

IN-REACH BEFORE OUTREACH: PREPARING THE CHURCH  
AND COMMUNITY FOR HOLISTIC GROWTH THROUGH  
EVANGELISM, MISSION AND DISCIPLESHIP

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
DAYTON, OHIO  
May, 2011

**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The objective of this project was to develop effective ways of preparing New Oakland City UMC to evangelize the surrounding community by mastering in-reach evangelism methods before engaging the community in outreach. Qualitative research methods were used to collect, process, analyze and interpret what people did and said. Action Research methods were used to ensure creative imagination and glean realistic insights for empowering and engaging participants. The data analysis indicated a great desire and need to effectively evangelize the community. The results of the project point to the need for ongoing evangelism training and deployment to ensure continued evangelistic success.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This *Journey from the Pool* has been one that has taken many turns and detours. I would like to take this time to thank those that have helped make this opportunity possible. “He knows, yes He knows, just how much we can bear,” and because if it had not been for the unmerited grace of God and the favor shown in this process it could not have happened, so I give God the glory first and foremost. I thank with all the love in my being my beautiful wife, Sheryl Simmons Jackson; for leading, pushing, urging, and sometimes even threatening the author as he navigated through the rough times. I would like to thank my parents, James L. and Gladys P. Jackson, for their unending love and support. I would like to thank Mazie and Larry Few, my sister and brother-in-law for their encouragement. I would like to say a special thanks you to my children; Scharee’, Raven, and Ellic for encouraging me to never give up.

A very special Thanks to my mentors, Dr. A. D. Washington and Dr. D. J. Moore, for getting me to *trust the process* from the beginning of this great journey, for sharing their knowledge and unconditional love as we moved through all phases to completion. The family created; that was a result of your openness. The covenant that we all shared as peers that made it impossible to move forward without knowing that we all moved in that same direction. Bringing together a group of strangers and teaching us how to become one in the Lord. May God continue to bless and strengthen you as you move forward pushing yet another group birthed through your love and teaching style.

I would like to say thanks to my Professional Associates (Dr. Lisa Allen, Dr. Edye Simpson, and Willie F. Goodman, Th.D.; friend and counsel) for their guidance through the process. There was always time given to make sure every aspect of the project had special attention.

Very special thanks to my Context Associates and the entire family of the New Oakland City UMC of Atlanta, Georgia. You are listed by name in my heart, thanks for your patients. I would like to give a special thanks to my Lay Leader Minister Wendell Wyckoff for your support and belief in this project.

Thanks to Reverend Minnie T. Robinson and the members of the East Point First Mallalieu UMC for their support and prayers.

I take this opportunity to thank my peers and colleagues as we worked together to guarantee that this moment would happen. The midnights, e-mails, prayers, laughs, tears, misunderstandings, support, technical help, re-writings, proofs, love, sickness, and sharing of our *call* made us a family, and I am blessed that we are a part of each other and we will live as one this day forward. To God be the glory!

I thank the South Fulton High School Class of 1969 and the East Point/South Fulton High Reunion Committee for your support and encouragement.

I thank my brothers Eddie B. Wolfe III, and Robert L. Eason for their friendship, love and support through prayer and encouragement, making sure I stayed the course.

Special thanks go out to that *great cloud of witnesses* on whose shoulders I stand: R.V. Jackson, Ola Mae Jackson, Ruby Monds, Mattie Meadows, Bernice Phillips, Mable Phillips, Walter and Pearl Phillips, Thomas and Willie Mae Simmons, Mary Francis Bridges, Ada Odessa Wilder, Aunt Alice, , Bessie Kate Few, Eddie McMichael Sr., Eddie

McMichael Jr., Charles J. Sargent Jr., Horace C. Fisher, Bessie Travis, Sandford Travis,  
Frank and Gwendolyn Travis, Charity Mae Travis, Elise Tigner, Johnnie Haynes, Johnnie  
Mae Slaughter and Freddie Robinson. Thanks for believing in me. R.I.P.

## INTRODUCTION

Churches within United Methodism and other mainstream Protestant denominations must begin re-envisioning and reconfiguring themselves by developing more relevant and viable ministries that speak to the whole person by addressing their emotional, spiritual, social, environmental, vocational, educational, political, economic, cultural, familial, and institutional needs. The gospel calls us to grow. We grow by offering people something of value and by cultivating spiritual and practical resources that will enable them to become change agents in their churches, homes, families, and communities. By developing this approach, we can pilot programs that will revitalize not only individual churches, but the denominations we serve. Churches can ill afford to have for-members-only, country-club approaches to ministry or simply cultivate narcissistic, navel-gazing theologies, which are always inward looking and never outward reaching.<sup>1</sup>

The author has begun the process of bringing together resources in order to reach the goal of empowering the church to do what it was put on earth to do; to grow. By developing ministries that understand church systems and the gifts and talents of congregational leaders, churches are able to better serve communities where they are placed. Thus, pastors are freed to understand his/her role in the church and begin to put forth the effort necessary to prepare for the up-building of God's people and community. When the process of preparing the church and pastor are connected to the understanding

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<sup>1</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 18-19.

of the contextual setting of the church and community, synergy begins to rise and show forth possibilities of where growth can take place.

When Ronsonn decided to attend seminary to prepare to serve the people of God, it was his hope that seminary would lead him to the tools necessary to fulfill the call that God had on his life. Coming to grips with who he is as a person allows him to understand that those things in his life that he thought were destroying his personality, were actually strengthening him to see who he was and how God could use this once lost but not forgotten soul. His father was constantly telling him that he had to think and be prepared to do the smallest of things. Whether it was school related homework, playing games, or leading Sunday school class, the theme of the day was be prepared before you speak; think, before you answer. This led Ronsonn to always consider the outcome before he would answer any question, so being prepared was embedded within him at an early age.

He remembers sitting in his first seminary class and listening to the teacher as she talked about what was needed in order to complete and pass this course. His mind went back to those nights of stretching out his arms and legs in an effort to learn the directions on the compass because he had made a miscalculation and his father would use a firm method of persuasion on him every time he would make a mistake. Could he finish this new task before him? A tear formed in the corner of his eye and before he began to cry, he remembered he was answering God's call and God had promised that God would be with him through all his trials and tribulations and this was just another test. That is why on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of May 2009; Ronsonn received his Master of Divinity degree from The Interdenominational Theological Center, Gammon Seminary, and is in the process of completing Phase IV in the Doctoral Program to receive his Doctor of Ministry degree

from United Theological Seminary on May 21, 2011, at 1:00 P.M.; being prepared! To  
God be the Glory!

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **The Village**

The author grew up in the Tri-City area south of metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. His hometown was called country by everyone he came in contact with because there were chickens raised and kept there right in the middle of the city. An elderly white man that lived in the neighborhood, Mr. Martin, had a two-to- three acre farm with a mule that he used to plow the field. He can remember seeing someone walking by his bedroom window every Saturday or Sunday morning as he lay in bed. First there was a feeling of uneasy fear until he realized that it was Mr. Martin dropping off vegetables from the garden that was in the back of their house; being neighborly.

East Point, Georgia was known as the seventh largest industrial city in Georgia at the time (1951-1965). Atlanta was ten to fifteen miles to the north, Ronson's elementary and high school was two blocks west of their house, his church was two blocks to the east, and the Atlanta Airport was less than five miles to the south of where he lived. There were five churches, four fields used for playing baseball, football, and other games, one skating area (fenced in) made of cement in the apartment complex in the neighborhood known as Washington Circle, a little house where the boy scouts met, and a swimming pool. During the spring the Little League Baseball teams would start to organize and play through the summer. The pool would open and be the center gathering

place for every child in the neighborhood and Ronsonn would be the first one there because his mother worked there as an attendant and cashier. Everybody in the community knew each other and every child belonged to every adult that lived in this little country city. This was truly a village.

Ronsonn was raised in the Methodist church of this great community, but worshipped in all the denominations of that area because all the churches shared their worship service on the fifth Sunday as it appeared on the calendar. His father and mother were and still are very active in the church. There was no option when it came to Sunday morning. Ronsonn and his sister Mazie were the first to be present in Sunday school every Sunday because their father was the Sunday school superintendant. He and his sister would rush to see who would ring the church bell that filled the air to let the neighborhood know that it was time to be in church. This bell would continue to go off in Ronsonn's head throughout his life. Regardless of what the weekend issued out, Ronsonn found himself in church on Sunday morning.

## **EDUCATION**

Being educated two blocks from his house, his father the P.T.A president and civic leader of the neighborhood, Ronsonn found out early in life that getting into trouble was not to be considered. The village would report any little thing that was out of the norm for a child, and the discipline could come from any adult that witnessed said event and then it was told to the parents and disciplinary action would be taken again by the parents. The community was the focal point for everybody during these times and all the adults felt responsible for each child whether you were a member of their immediate

family or one of the neighborhood's children, the village raised every child. Every child knew it to be in their best interest to be respectful towards every adult.

Ronsonn was a very respectful child, and because his father was always around the school, church, and even on the baseball field, he learned at a very early stage in life to always be on his best behavior; especially when adults were around. That's right; he became a shy but mischievous young person. He started playing the trombone in the fourth grade and played for many of the high school's graduation programs on through elementary school. He had piano lessons early in his life but that didn't last long. He was a member of the high school's marching and concert band and continued playing on into college.

Being a part of the Marching Wolverine Band of Morris Brown College afforded him many firsts in his life. Ronsonn's first trip out of Georgia came as a member of the band, his first flight on an air plane to California and New York to march in the Rose Bowl and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parades respectfully. These were also times when he had his first alcoholic beverage, first parties and other worldly related opportunities. The parties lasted a long time and the weekend seemed to come so quickly, but Sunday came at the end of every weekend and that meant Sunday school and morning worship. Now the Sunday school superintendant himself, Ronsonn's responsibilities began to change around the church. He began to develop his own understanding of God and Christianity he had witnessed earlier in his church by family and others. Church played a very important role in his growth and understanding of how the importance of community would become a needed tool to nurture that growth. The social life continued

and Ronsonn enjoyed all that it offered. He graduated from Morris Brown College in 1973 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology and a minor in Education/Sociology.

## **VOCATION AND FAMILY**

Finding a job after graduation in the fields he had studied did not come easy. Matter-of-fact, they did not come at all. Ronsonn had worked as a Metro bus operator during college, so he went back to apply for a full-time position and now was gainfully employed. Between May and December he and his high school girl friend decided to get married. The author experienced arguing, verbal and fiscal confrontations and eventually an irreconcilable difference divorce after eighteen months, this was a strange time in Ronsonn's life.

The next few years were very hard to adjust to; Ronsonn had planned his life out in high school. Graduate from college, get a job, get married, have those two-and-a-half children and live happily ever after. It did not happen as he planned and the failure pushed him into a very dark place; a place where relationships had no meaning and friends were mere acquaintances with no real substance. When all seemed to be lost, the community with its village participants popped up its beautiful head and showed him there were relevant friends and people who still cared. Friendships that he thought were dead were like smoldering logs in a fire that needed stirring. Letters from a brother in the Air Force, calls from college classmates, and a job that led him to think more about others rather than focusing on him. Things began to look brighter and Ronsonn like a

Palm tree began to straighten up and weather the storm. A storm that taught him, “He knows how much we can bear.”<sup>1</sup>

This new job led Ronsonn to working for those in the neighborhood, to help them find jobs, pay utilities; nurseries for young mothers to leave their children as they searched for work, and find lodging for those without homes. This job brought Ronsonn back to the community helping others to become responsible citizens in society. The job also was the place that he met his wife of thirty years as of the sixteenth day of February, two thousand and ten, Sheryl Simmons Jackson. From this union there are three children; Ronni Scharee' Jackson, Raven -Vincent Miles Jackson, and Ellic Shamar Jackson. They would be upset if he did not mention the newest addition to the family of five years; their boxer Zeta Scar Jackson.

The beginning of these thirty years brought about changes in jobs, church, and serving God's people and community. After marrying Sheryl, Ronsonn decided to join Friendship Baptist Church of College Park, Georgia, (her home church), where they were members for fifteen years. It was while there at Friendship that Ronsonn accepted the call to serve God. They later went back to Ronsonn's home church, Mallalieu United Methodist Church, in East Point, Georgia. After serving as Lay Leader and Worship Leader at Mallalieu, Ronsonn shared with the pastor of the church, Reverend Minnie T. Robinson that he believed that God had called him to serve in the field of ministry. He decided to attend The Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) as a seminary student to grow and enable himself to better serve the community and people of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Roberta Martin, *We Are Our Heavenly Father's Children*, Words and Tune 1941 (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2005).

## GETTING READY

Ronsonn chose ITC because of the ministers he had noticed that came from that great institution and the sense of community that existed on the campus. He was not disappointed. The ITC experience was all that he thought it would be and more. It was also this sense of community that led him to make the decision to further his education in advanced preparation for the practice of ministry at United Theological Seminary.

The process of readiness and preparation has led Ronsonn to his project for the Degree, Doctor of Ministry. His project is entitled, *In-Reach before Out-Reach; Preparing the Congregation for Wholistic Community Growth*. Being prepared is second nature to Ronsonn. Growing up, his father was constantly reminding him that knowing what to do and how to do it was all about preparation. Thinking through what had to be done, studying the process needed and preparing for the presentation leading to the end results to complete the project. Completing the project was not the only objective of being prepared and reading one's self for success in any area chosen. Ronsonn believed that if you prepare properly the knowledge gained would be shared with all involved and generations could benefit from the completed proposal.

## CONTEXT AND HISTORY

While attending ITC in 2005, Ronsonn was assigned to the New Oakland City United Methodist Church as a student pastor. This church is a part of the Oakland City community of Atlanta, Georgia. Located in the 30310 area zip code, this urban neighborhood has seen many changes in its physical make-up and the people that populate this historical city of Atlanta will be the context of Ronsonn's project.

The church is now located at 1093 Arlington Avenue. Its beginning was five to six blocks west of this location in an area known as Bunker Hill in the Oakland City community. In 1920 members of the Bunker Hill church purchased land and relocated to 1304 Ladd Street in the Bush Mountain neighborhood. The Bunker Hill Church was then renamed Ladd Street Church. After the growth of the congregation the church moved again to 1950 Ladd Street. In the process of rebuilding, the church was reorganized and in 1967 the church joined the United Methodist Church.<sup>2</sup>

During the late 60's and 70's, Bush Mountain and Oakland City communities changed from predominantly white to predominantly Black. In July of 1972, Ladd Street United Methodist Church merged with Oakland City United Methodist located at 1093 Arlington Avenue SW. There were many pastors that served Ladd Street/Oakland City United Methodist Church. In 1983 Ladd Street/Oakland City UMC was reorganized under the leadership of Reverend Phillip Armstrong. To reflect the times and many changes in the community, the name of the church was changed to New Oakland City United Methodist Church. Ronsonn still serves as the pastor in charge of this great church and is looking forward to continuing the awesome heritage that exists in this community and its people.<sup>3</sup>

The church again finds itself in the mist of change in this community. Houses that were once boarded up with ply-wood and closed are now being opened up and back on the market for sale as single family dwellings. According to the 30310—Fact Sheet-

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<sup>2</sup>Church History; New Oakland City United Methodist Church, March 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

American Fact Finder, median household income here, \$24,604, is significantly lower than the U. S. average, \$56,604. The population is primarily African-American, and mostly single. The average house value here, \$69,700 is significantly lower than in the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta metro area as a whole, so this is probably a great place to look for housing bargains.<sup>4</sup> With this knowledge, Ronsonn is able to prepare a plan that would put in place an evangelistic move in this area that will show a significant growth in church attendance, membership, and disciples made for Christ. But before he can put this plan in motion, Ronsonn realizes that (in his opinion) the church is in need of a “complete, thoroughgoing conversion experience.”<sup>5</sup> In order for the church to serve the community outside the walls of comfort inside, it must first ready itself for spiritual growth inside the church and build relationships with each other and God in order to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Ronsonn stands firm in his faith that this will happen through training in discipleship, mission, and evangelism.

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<sup>4</sup>Fact Finder Census Data, <http://factfinder.census.gov>.(accessed July 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001).

## CHAPTER TWO

### STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

A fresh image of evangelism permeating the life of the church would have the same transforming effect as new lenses in glasses that have long been out of focus. A positive new concept would stir our expectations of ourselves and those to whom we go in faithful witness. It would doubtless trigger new efforts in evangelizing as well. Why? Because images wield enormous power over our expectations and our behavior, more power than most of us realize.

Think for a moment how images shape our expectations. If we hold a negative image of evangelism, the mere mention of the word evokes suspicion. Once that suspicion is activated, we raise our defenses and close our minds.

There were several barriers to evangelism gathered from our context participants. Many of these objections arise from false, distorted ideas. *Fear of rejection* surfaces from a person who believes that coercion must be used to gain a decision from the subject. If witness were understood as the expression of love to another person, would it conjure up this fear?<sup>1</sup>

Evangelism often suffers from guilt by association. Distortions of true evangelism dominate the church's thinking. Dr. Georgia Harkness says, "We must rescue evangelism from the red light district of the ecclesiastical community." Evangelism has been

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Jonson, *An Evangelism Primer; Practical Principles for Congregations* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983).

prostituted—for money, members, personal gain. Because image evoked through association exerts such power, we must recompose the picture of evangelism in the mind of the church.

In addition to influencing our expectations, image has yet another power. It controls behavior. For example, we normally associate flashing lights on top of moving cars with police officers in pursuit. No matter what speed we are travelling, when we glimpse a flashing light in our rear-view mirror, our foot automatically goes to the brake. We should respond the same way even if the car has a yellow light and *wide load* attached to the front bumper.

If image wields so much power, then the image persons have of evangelism should be crucially important. Of course, not every member in every church thinks of evangelism negatively. Yet my sampling of numerous congregations confirms that the word *evangelism* evokes anything but positive, attractive pictures in people's minds.

If images hold the potency to determine our lives and responses, and if the prevailing perception of evangelism tends to be a reaction to revivalism and *hard sell* personal witnessing, what idea holds the power to generate a new image? Where do we discover it? It must come from our understanding of the church. A biblical understanding of the church must give birth to the new image of evangelism.<sup>2</sup>

The New Testament contains two symbols for the church which can create a new image of evangelism: the people of God and the body of Christ. While these two symbols overlap in meaning, each contains distinctive emphases which must be included in an adequate image of evangelism.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The people-of-God image implies a special purpose for the church: to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you.”<sup>3</sup> The people whom God has chosen recognize God’s wonderful acts in the world. They discern the action of God in their history and proclaim God’s will. In our day that witness may take the form of protest against witness is certainly as evangelistic as telling an individual about the forgiving, accepting love of Christ. The people-of-God image implies a hope for the future. God’s people have always carried in their hearts the dream of a kingdom, a kingdom of justice, equality, and wholeness—the purpose of God made actual in history. Evangelism inspired by the people-of-God motif can never leap irresponsibly into eternity avoiding the struggle for righteousness and justice here and now.

Finally, the people-of-God image affirms the relationship of this special people to God and to each other. This special people has been created by God the Father, called through Jesus Christ the Son, and united in a fellowship by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit opens these persons to each other in fellowship and to the world in service. The hallmark of the Spirit’s activity is love. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”<sup>4</sup> The Spirit creates the church as a fellowship by the calling of persons to Christ, recreates them in his image, and unites them in a fellowship of love. Hence, the church is a fellowship of persons through the Spirit. This fellowship sustains believers, but their love creates a magnetic attraction to those outside the fellowship. Through their dynamic life the Spirit draws unbelievers into the fellowship and transforms them through their participation.

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<sup>3</sup>1 Pt 2:9.

<sup>4</sup>1 Jn 4:16b.

This image of the church presupposes the necessity of a vital fellowship at the center of the church's life. Evangelism springs spontaneously from this living center, and this fellowship incarnates redemptive power because it is a bearer of the Spirit. Therefore, before a church can practice evangelism, it may need to seek the renewal of its own life. The relational dimension of the fellowship model informs the style of interpersonal witnessing which the church should adopt.<sup>5</sup>

The body of Christ includes all persons. In the body of Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female"<sup>6</sup> You are all one in Christ Jesus." Paul says. Evangelism founded on the body of Christ must include all persons regardless of race, language, social or economic class.

The body as conceived by Paul receives its directive from Christ, the head. We are members of the body, but all the members are subject to the head. Christ has given different stations to different persons. Some are apostles; others are prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These leaders equip and guide the body in its ministry. But in this body all members have been gift. Each member has a gift, and the gift has been given for the good of all. Evangelistically, all persons should discover their gift and use it to build up the body.

Finally, the dominant character of the body is love. In the center of Paul's description of the gifts of the Spirit, he pauses to insert the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. He concludes, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."<sup>7</sup> In this judgment Paul and John agree: love determines the church's life, its ministry, and

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ga 3:28.

<sup>7</sup>1 Co 13:13.

its effectiveness. The most inspired preaching amounts to nothing without love; the greatest sacrifice is wasted without love; and faith that can move mountains is worthless without love. Thus, in all our evangelistic activity love must inspire our motive, direct our actions, and sustain our efforts. Evangelism divorced from love becomes spiritual abuse.<sup>8</sup>

The body-of-Christ image speaks poignantly to our situation with its implications for holistic evangelism which emphasizes the Christ centered redemptive activity. But the new image must denote the powerful, life-transforming fellowship rooted in the Spirit. The emphasis on history, purpose, and hope rooted in the people-of-God symbol must also be expressed. The body-of-Christ image gathers up most of the pertinent emphases, and it can bear the weight of the historical, the purposive, and the hopeful. As already pointed out, the experience of unity and fellowship is implicit in the body of Christ. What symbol gathers up the meaning of body and evangelism?

The word *organismic* has been chosen to define the kind of evangelism that stems from the understanding of the church that has been set forth. An organism is a complex structure of interdependent and subordinate elements whose relations and functions are largely determined by their relation to the whole. *Organismic evangelism* is, therefore, a complex structure of being, doing, and telling the *good news*; its interrelationships are largely determined by the evangelistic imperative to the whole body of Christ: “to make disciples of all nations.”<sup>9</sup>

The author agrees that in order for the church to be relative to all persons, a new way of thinking must come to the forefront and lead the body and the people to do the

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<sup>8</sup>Ben Johnson, *An Evangelism Primer*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

work of growing the church evangelistically. But this model must not find itself caring or pinning on itself a badge of superficial religiosity that is placed so that it can be seen by people as they approach, but nothing is actually happening in the church. Organized forms of practicing church can no longer be the norm. Outler says, we have to “grow up in Christ” and be sincere about our vocation and not see it as a part-time hobby.

In his book “Evangelism Is...” Clinton Marsh ask the question where now? How do we see evangelism in this twenty-first century where we live? The shrinking membership is one of the prices the Presbyterian and other churches pay for their class nature. Arising out of its Scottish background, the Presbyterian Church looked to its own families for regeneration. It often excused itself from active evangelism outside its families by claiming that it produced its constituency through its family life and worship and church school. How that indifference to outsiders fitted in with a deep commitment to evangelism across the world was never clear. But seldom was the church aggressive in its own community.

Now, with middle-and upper-class family size shrinking, the children are not there to be the replacements for the dying. The people who are having more children are not in our churches. The average of 4.1 infant baptisms per church per year over a span of twenty-three years clearly shows the fallacy of the theory of internal evangelism. So we pay the price for our classism and racism. But the church can not sit still with its self-generated or imported problems that create the barriers. It must take seriously the unity of humanity that scripture reveals. That unity is sustained by science, for a person in need of a blood transfusion might find a blood match anywhere in the world. Christ died for the salvation of all humanity.

The Great Commission (Matt. 28: 16-20) and the charge in Acts 1:8 cancel out the pagan concepts of class and race. The church is God's ministering agency to humanity—across the fence, across the street, across the railroad tracks, across town, across the world. God brooks no barriers.<sup>10</sup>

While the church had hardly faced these old challenges, new ones of unpredictable proportions are rushing in upon us. Waves of recent immigrants with their fertility are creating a different and diverse society. Now that they are our neighbors it will be so easy to forget that they are the people to whom we have sent countless missionaries and in whom we have invested millions of dollars for them to "hear the word." Now *foreign mission* is in town. We can no longer just give some money and commission some brave people to go to the far places of the world. Foreign mission has become evangelism. To break those barriers we need to learn a procedure that our overseas personnel are learning—*dialogue*. It means talking back and forth about Christianity and their traditional faith. It means treating their religion and culture with respect. We do not in this process compromise the gospel, but we learn where they are in order to know how to explain the meaning of the Christian faith. This prospect can be staggering when we are not sure how to communicate with family, friends, and colleagues about Jesus Christ. Dialogue may well go farther. There may be religious truths that we can learn from them. If we believe that the Holy Spirit is at work among all people, it is reasonable to believe that out of their religion and their culture they have perceptions of truth that can enrich our own. Thus our listening can be learning, not merely looking for openings to put our points across.

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<sup>10</sup>Clinton Marsh, *Evangelism Is...*, (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press).

Breaking barriers is an essential function of the gospel. When the church breaks these bonds of social servitude, however, when it ceases to float with the secular tide and declares its independence from social restraints, it will pay the price. The price, ironically, may be further loss of numbers—at least for a while. But if it is done “on [his] account, it will be love in action—that is, evangelism. And it will be crossing barriers.

The rest we leave to God.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of becoming fishers of people as a result of Christ-centered teaching and training is vital to what Stewart calls the Back-Door Ministry approach. Jesus points to catching *fish*, or people, as the most important objective of the ministry. The *nets* symbolize the methods (programs) we use to help bring someone to Christ. The Back-Door Ministry in itself is a net, but there should be other nets within the net. The other nets, or programs, depend upon the kinds of people you are trying to reach and ultimately bring to Christ. Programs will never be sufficient in themselves; they are only tools. The traditional church must provide passionate people from its own ranks to develop these ministries by loving the people and interacting with them one on one. There is no substitute for human love and expression that are unleashed when we hug and embrace each other as equals in the sight of God.

The challenge faced by many churches today, particularly those planted in the inner cities of our country, is the continuance of teaching and training of church members and leaders from both a theological and Christological perspective. By Christological, the author mean observing, studying, and practicing community outreach in ways that are consistent with narratives of Jesus in the New Testament. There are numerous dramatic

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

illustrations, didactic teachings, and instructions that show us what it means to reach out to people in the community to address both material and spiritual needs.<sup>12</sup>

This Back-Door Ministry drew the interest of many other community residents and representatives of other organizations who wanted to make sure that our programs were supported. Congregations that develop outreach programs to address real problems, challenges, or needs of the community are perceived by the same community to be on target, relevant, and desirable. Such congregations have the magnetism to draw people who may have given up on the church. People's hearts are touched, emotions are stirred, and spirits are enlarged when they believe the church cares for them. Every church should develop programs for the community. The number of fish that can be caught through community outreach is limited only by the presence or absence of nets. Churches that clean and tighten their nets in the interest of effectively reaching people with God's love will catch fish. Through community outreach, the author have seen and experienced how faith and hard work can bring about the fulfillment of the scripture that says, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16: 25).<sup>13</sup>

Evangelism is currently a passionate preoccupation of the U.S. church. This accent on evangelism is no doubt a reflection of the deep crisis facing the church. On the surface, there is a *drive for survival* as mainline churches notice diminished membership, diminished dollars, and eroding influence and importance. Below that surface agenda, there is the growing awareness among us of the resistance of our culture to the primary

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<sup>12</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *Growing the African American Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

claims of the gospel. That resistance takes the form of secularism, oft-times expressed as indifference, and frequently evokes in response a kind of fearful legalism. It is clear, however, that the power of secularism is finally destructive, and that the reaction of legalism provides no adequate response or resolve on the part of the church.

Beneath the growing awareness of that hostility to the gospel, moreover, there is the simple *news* of the gospel itself that provides a missionary impetus for sharing the news with our *news starved* society. Finally the ground of evangelism is found in the gospel; itself, and not in any church condition or societal need.

The urgency of evangelism thus is a multilayered and complex reality in the church. For that reason, it does not surprise us that there is no ready agreement among us on the meaning of evangelism, let alone consensus about strategies and procedures. Indeed, evangelism clearly means many different things to many different people. For that reason, it is not surprising that evangelism, to a scripture teacher, in large part consists of attending to and participating in the transformational drama that is enacted in the biblical text itself.

In what follows, Brueggemann argues that the decisive clues for our practice of evangelism are found in the drama and dynamic transaction of the biblical text itself. This claim requires on our part a very different understanding of and relation to the text. In what follows, he does not assume that the biblical text is not a handbook for morality or doctrine as it is often regarded, nor on the other hand, is it an historical record, as many are wont to take it. Rather the biblical text is the articulation of imaginative models of reality in which *text-users*, i.e., readers in church and synagogue, are invited to participate. The texts continue to be alive and invitational because they refuse to stay

*back there*, but always insist upon being *present tense*: and contemporary. Thus biblical texts were not simply formed and fixed (either by some once-for-all divine disclosure or by some nameable human author); they were shaped by and for repeated use in the community, especially in the practice of worship, but in many other contexts as well.<sup>14</sup> And when the community of faith *uses* a text in its own life and practice, it reenacts not only the substantive (moral, doctrinal) claims of the text, but also the dramatic, transformational potential of the text. Thus Brueggemann proposes that such a dramatic, dynamic understanding of the biblical text as imaginative model of reality provides an important interface with the church's current preoccupation with evangelism.

Evangelism, he proposes, is *doing the text* again, as our text and as *news* addressed to us and waiting to be received, appropriated, and enacted in our own time and place. By doing the text, he means to entertain, attend to, participate in, and reenact the drama of the text. To be sure, not all texts are for us useable models, depending upon our understanding of the gospel. And not all texts have equal transformative potential. In what follows, Brueggemann selected texts which make a certain kind of presentation from a certain angle about the news. He has no theme of evangelism and our moment of faithfulness in the life of the church, and so he stacked the cards in that direction. In doing so, he appealed especially to the practice of Luther and Calvin who focused on texts which voiced the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

Brueggemann saw evangelism as a drama, a narrative account that has a beginning, middle, and an end. For the drama to work properly, each character must play

<sup>14</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism; Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

a proper role. The drama has three scenes; in the first scene, there is combat, struggle, and conflict between powerful forces who battle for control of the turf and the future.

Evangelism makes no sense unless the drama is understood agonistically, i.e., as combat and struggle. In the second scene, there is an additional character not present in the first scene. It is the announcer, the proclaimer, the witness who gives testimony and tells the outcome he has watched. The purpose of the announcer is to make the outcome available, credible, significant, and present tense to those who were not there and who saw nothing, but who receive what happened at second hand. In the third scene, the announcer has now spoken and the listener has heard. The conflict over, the announcing has ended. Now the listener must make an appropriate response to the new situation, letting the newly announced reality reshape life in new ways. This drama in three scenes is not finished. Each scene must be endlessly reenacted. This reenacting of the scenes keeps the text alive and serves as a way of reliving the story of the text over and over again.

Another model of evangelism that is on the scene is Needs-Based Thinking. The basic premise of needs-based evangelism is, first, as follower of Jesus Christ and committed Christians; we are called to do two things: make disciples of Jesus Christ, and help persons in need. To separate this into two is false, for needs-based evangelism is built upon the premise that if you meet needs, if it is done authentically, we lead people to Christ. The basic concept is that one of the reasons needs-based evangelism works well is that the gospel is brought to people's lives at the time they are interested, vulnerable, and open. In that way, it is authentic in terms of care and evangelism. Third, needs-based evangelism is built upon the concept of grace—that is, it begins not from anger or guilt or

judgment, but from love and care and sensitivity and concern. It can only be done effectively in churches whose theology is one of grace rather than judgment. Grace and judgment are part of all theological perspectives, but needs-based evangelism works when grace is the beginning perspective, the dominating perspective. The fourth concept of needs-based evangelism is that it must be done as part of a whole church's self-understanding. It must come out of a biblical commitment to do what Jesus taught. The Great Commandment, the Great Commission, the story of the judgment day in Matthew 25, the instructions in James 2 and 1 John 4, all provide the theological and biblical basis for needs-based evangelism. Finally, for a church to needs-based evangelism effectively, there must be consensus within the church—that is, the church must have written a mission statement and developed slogans and metaphors to describe their commitment to being a good Samaritan church. This must be taught and lifted up to the entire congregation over and over and over in order for the entire system to work. Repetition and redundancy become keys to that affirmation of purpose. The way in which that is taught is not only through a cognitive explaining that it is the right thing to do, but also by affirming the congregation whenever the church responds in that way. It is to give the reward of affirmation openly to members of the congregations who do the action of Christ and to minimize the recognition of action that is simply local church maintenance instead of mission.<sup>16</sup>

Another model that is coming back on the scene and yet it may have never left in some areas is found in the book, *Telling the Story*. It is a book about evangelism in the black church tradition and the use of story as a primary vehicle for sharing that tradition.

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<sup>16</sup>Robert D. Pierson, *Needs-Based Evangelism; Becoming A Good Samaritan Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006).

By tradition the author refers to a network of beliefs, attitudes, and ideals that are passed down through generations. Every community has some medium to transmit its collective character. From the beginning of time, story has been used to pass on the beliefs, attitudes, and ideals to succeeding generations. Such transmission is not neutral. Passing on the collective character from one generation to the next was a way of preserving reality or the world view as that culture perceived it. We commonly understand this method as oral tradition. Afro-Americans have made primary use of this medium to pass on their collective character to succeeding generations. Story here means a narrative account of certain events. It is more than just an account—it is an imaginative way of ordering our experience. The author states that he makes a distinction between imaginative and imaginary. The imaginary represents that which is unreal while the imaginative represents the creative, constructive powers of the mind. *Story*, James Cone notes, “Is the history of individuals coming together in the struggle to shape life according to commonly held values.” Thus story is the possession of a community. It possesses its own language that provides a sense of the community’s reality. While there are personal stories, they are personal only to the extent that the individual shaped by that community while at the same time the individual participates in the shaping of the community. The personal story is fragmentary. The community story is the sum of the personal stories and more.<sup>17</sup>

When looking at evangelism in the history of Christianity, we must acknowledge that the activities of evangelism and the black church movement did not occur in a theological, social, or historical vacuum. The church is the people of God, the body of

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<sup>17</sup>James O. Stallings, *Telling the Story; Evangelism In Black Churches* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004).

Christ, who have been called into community by the saving, liberating work of God in Jesus Christ. Its fellowship has been empowered by the Holy Spirit for engagement in mission within the world. Mission involves everything the church does: proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God and being involved in activity to liberate humankind from spiritual, social, psychological, physical and economic bondage. All are included in the mission of the church. Evangelism therefore is mission, part of comprehensive mission of the church.<sup>18</sup>

Evangelism (from Gr. *euangelion*, *good news*) is the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ through a variety of means. Whether it is telling your story, acting out a drama from the text, making Disciples of Christ, or helping persons in need. All the models have a common thread and that is people working together to bring persons to Christ and the sharing of the good news. Its not about the number people in the congregation on Sunday morning listening to the sermon, but it is how many of the number in that setting are going out and sharing what they heard about the love and works of Jesus. If there are only six congregants present, if they each go out and tell the good news then the word is going forth and this author believes that evangelism is taken place.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### Biblical Foundations

It is evident that the New Testament gives witness to the mutual relationship of the community of the Triune God—God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer—in mission. In *missio Dei*, God is the primordial agent of and in mission; mission is thus an *event in and of community*. God's mission is a participatory and communal activity among God's self. God the Creator sends God the Redeemer, and God the Redeemer sends God the Sustainer and the church. In this sending the church is never found absent of God's missional activity, but rather accompanied, guided, and in community with and by the Spirit of Christ in the church's discernment and co-participation in mission.

This communal participation in mission is uniquely cross-cultural. The missional purposes of the Triune God—one God, three persons—become real through the activity of three different expressions of God. It is this interplaying relationship of the three persons of the Trinity and Christian communities that provides a new understanding of mission. This communal and mutually dependent character of the Triune God is described with the Greek term *perichoresis*. This *perichoretic*, interdependent relationship between the Triune God and God's people in mission is what the author calls the *matrix of mission*. The church, as a community in mission, is in the *matrix of mission*. Thus, the church is not only a subject of mission—

which by itself renders into an ecclesiocentric practice of mission—but it is also an object of mission, completely covered, embraced in God's missionary activity, called to repent, change, and renew its missionary commitment and practice in the world.

Through God's missionary activity in the world, Christian communities co-participating in God's mission learns to *live* the gospel of the reign of God, hence, begin to understand it. The gospel is more than prepositional statements about doctrine and order. The gospel is God's living action of redemption and liberation for creation. The gospel is alive and has movement in the world. It is the force that resists evil and transforms death into life. It is the gift and hope of reconciliation despite war and injustice. It is the power of liberation in a world of oppression.

Thus, the eschatological dimension in the *matrix of mission* is found in the confrontation between God's liberating power and the oppressive and destructive powers of evil in this world. The Christian community, when living the gospel of Jesus Christ, is participating in God's mission and experiencing the end times, the eschatological moments that point to God's continuing work in the cosmos.<sup>1</sup>

As the Christian community continues to work and participate in God's mission, it is my belief that we must be prepared to take on the challenges we are confronted with in order to carry out the great commission ion our lifetime; to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We are able to find the needed guidance to fulfill this readiness by looking to the biblical passages that relate to the background needed to assist the writer and his congregation prepare to become fishers of people. The foundations needed to help them

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide: The Church in the Matrix of Mission* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 78.

succeed in accomplishing this missional task will be found in the Old and New Testament Scriptures as they relate to evangelism, discipleship, and mission.

There are many Scriptures that relate to readiness and being prepared to go forth and engage in an evangelistic act of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Seen as an act of mission in the community in which the church, congregation, and Pastor resides, being prepared to serve this community as people of God, participating in the great commission as Christians, getting and staying ready to prepare disciples for Jesus Christ was not an option but a requirement for believers of God and God's will.

In the third chapter of Luke we are told to, "Prepare the way of the Lord," words exhorted by the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament to punish oppression and injustice. Conditions present in the Old and New Testament is present today. There were wars, sickness, poverty, and injustice; a world like ours, populated with people like ours. However, God made preparations in the birth of Jesus. God acted decisively to bring new life to individuals and transformation to human cultures. John was to turn many of his countrymen to God. The angel's reference to the spirit of Elijah made it perfectly clear to anyone familiar with the Scriptures that this babe was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. John's birth announcement was at the same time an announcement that God was at last ready to act—God was about to intervene in the world of men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Larry Richards, Lawrence O. Richards, *Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 644.

There was such a need for John's ministry. To prepare Israel for the Messiah, John would be used by God to "turn the hearts of ... the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous" (Luke 1:17).<sup>3</sup>

In the person of Jesus, God extended humanity an invitation to new life. This is the same invitation that Ronsonn sees as the mission of the New Oakland City United Methodist Church. To offer to those living in the 30310 zip code an opportunity to receive the gift of Jesus, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full?*" The newness of life spoken of in the book of Luke is needed to transform the lives of the unchurched or those that do not have a church home.<sup>4</sup> Ronsonn believes that in order to accomplish this act, he and the congregation must be prepared and ready for doing the work of God.

According to 2 Timothy, Ronsonn sees the relationship of Paul and Timothy as an example of getting prepared to serve God's people. This happens when believers prepare themselves to share the newness of life with others as heirs to the Kingdom of God.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God,  
which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did  
not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of  
self-discipline.

Paul's conviction that Timothy had genuine faith led him to urge Timothy to fan his gift into an open flame. The phrase *for this reason* is in reference to possessing genuine faith. Because Timothy had genuine faith, Paul urged him to set it ablaze. The expression *fan into flame* describes the act of rekindling the embers of a dying fire. The command

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Larry Richards, Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987, Logos Digital Library, 2008).

does not imply that Timothy had let his spiritual flame go out. It is an appeal for a continual, vigorous use of his spiritual gifts. Timothy was already using his gifts vigorously. In the face of Paul's impending death, he was to continue an ardent usage of his gifts. Rekindling his gifts would involve fervent prayer, obedience to God's Word, and demonstration of an active faith. The gift to which Paul referred was Timothy's gift for ministry. Timothy had to function in an environment of fear, heresy, and challenges to his leadership. His gift related to administration and organization rather than evangelism. The list of duties mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:2–5 are more administrative and pastoral, although Paul did urge him to do the work of an evangelist.<sup>5</sup>

### Evangelism

Evangelism is currently a passionate preoccupation of the U. S. church. The accent on evangelism is no doubt a reflection of the deep crisis facing the church. On the surface, there is a drive for survival as mainline churches notice diminished membership, diminished dollars, and eroding influence and importance. Below the surface, there is the growing awareness among Christians of the resistance of our culture to the primary claims of the gospel.

This resistance takes the form of secularism often times expressed as indifference, and frequently evokes in response a kind of fearful legalism. It is clear, however, that the power of secularism is finally destructive, and that the reaction of legalism provides no adequate response or resolve on the part of the church. Beneath the growing awareness of

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas D. Lea, Hayne P. Griffin, *1&2 Timothy. Titus* electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001).

that hostility to the gospel, moreover, there is the simple news of the gospel itself that provides a missionary impetus for sharing the news with a news starved society.

Finally the ground of evangelism is found in the gospel itself, and not in any church condition or societal need. Thus, the urgency of evangelism as a multilayered and complex reality is not always agreed upon let alone lends itself to consensus about strategies and procedures. Indeed, evangelism clearly means many different things to many different people.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Walter Brueggemann, it is not surprising that evangelism to a scripture teacher, in large part consists of attending to and participating in the transformational drama that is enacted in the biblical text itself. Brueggemann argues that the decisive clues for the practice of evangelism are found in the drama and dynamic transaction of the biblical text itself.

Brueggemann does not agree that the biblical text is a handbook for morality or doctrine as it is often regarded, nor is it an historical record. Rather the biblical text is the articulation of imaginative models of reality in which text-users, i.e., readers in church and synagogue, are invited to participate. The texts continue to be alive and invitational because they refuse to stay *back there*, but always insist upon being *present tense* and contemporary. Thus biblical texts were not simply formed and fixed (either by some once-for-all divine disclosure or by some nameable human author); they were shaped by and for repeated use in the community, especially in the practice of worship, but in many other contexts as well.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism; Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Evangelism, according to Brueggemann is *doing the text* again, as our text and *news* addressed to us and waiting to be received, appropriated, and enacted in our own time and place. By doing the text, he means to entertain, attend to, participate in, and reenact the drama of the text. To be sure, not all texts are for us useable models, depending upon our understanding of the gospel. And not all texts have equal transformative potential.<sup>8</sup>

Proverbs chapter 9, verses 1-6 is a foundational text for preparing the church and community for holistic growth. This text demonstrates the readiness needed before going forth to do church in the areas of mission, discipleship, and evangelism. Verses 1 and 2 of Proverbs say, “The house is built, the full number of pillars hewn, the beasts killed, the wine mingled, the table set out. Everything is arranged and executed; nothing is forgotten or omitted. Every guest will find that which he needs. How complete is the preparation which God has made for us in the gospel of grace and life!”<sup>9</sup>

The whole of the Old Testament may be said to be a part of the history of God’s preparation. All God’s dealings with God’s ancient people, and God’s control of the heathen nations, were leading up to the one great issue—the redemption of mankind by a life-giving Savior. The New Testament continues the same account; the birth, the ministry, the life, the sorrows, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the evangelizing work and the interpretive letters of the apostles, form the last part of the divine preparation. Everything is complete, the house is built, the table is spread, the wine outpoured. There is nothing which a guilty, sorrowing, striving, seeking soul can hunger

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Proverbs* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 191.

or thirst for which it will not find at this heavenly feast. Mercy, full reconciliation, unfailing friendship, comfort, strength, hope, joy in God, everlasting life,—everything is there.<sup>10</sup>

Verses 3, 4 of Proverbs say, “Wisdom sends ‘her maidens’ and cries upon the highest places of the city.” She charges those to speak who are likeliest to be listened to, and to utter her invitation where it is surest to be heard.” Moreover, she does not restrict her call to those who may be said to be her own children; on the other hand, she addresses herself especially to those who are strange to her—to *the simple*, to “him that wanteth understanding.” In the gospel of the grace of God: (1) It is the gracious Lord himself who speaks to us, and in the most winning way. It is he himself who says, “Come unto me;” “If any man thirst,” etc.; “I am the Bread of life,” etc. (2) He has, in his providence and grace, caused the message of mercy to be sounded where all can hear it—“upon the highest places of the city.” (3) He calls all men to his bountiful board, especially those who are in the greatest need.<sup>11</sup>

Wisdom calls  
those who hear her messengers to forsake folly, to walk in righteousness, and thus to enter into life. The Wisdom of God himself calls those who hear his voice to (1) Turn from their iniquity, turning away from the fellowship of the unholy as well as from the practice of sin; (2) Enter into closest fellowship with him himself; thus eating of the bread and drinking of the water of life; thus walking in the way of truth, holiness, love,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

wisdom; thus going in the way of understanding; and (3) Partake with him the life which is Divine and eternal—life for God, life in God, life with God for ever.<sup>12</sup>

### Discipleship

The basic demand of Christian discipleship is that we take up our cross daily and follow Christ. Paul stretched this metaphor further by saying that “we must not only take up our cross and walk with it, but actually see that the execution takes place.”<sup>13</sup>

The mortifying work of self-crucifixion is a continuous, lifelong process, for this side of heaven we dwell in mortal bodies and are bound by inordinate desires. J. Brown describes the continual putting to death of the flesh with all its sinful passions and desires in this way: “Crucifixion … produced death not suddenly but gradually. … True Christians do not succeed in completely destroying it (that is the flesh) while here below; but they have fixed it to the cross and they are determined to keep it there till it expires.”<sup>14</sup> This verse tells us that there is no shortcut to spiritual victory in the life of the Christian. No second blessing, or rededication, or spiritual quick-fix can take the place of consistent, obedient, vigilant renunciation of the world and mortification of the flesh. The very first and the last two of Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* points to the significance of this fact for us:

- When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent”, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>J. R. W. Stott, *Only One Way* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1968), 112-13.

<sup>14</sup>John Brown, *Commentary on Galatians*, <http://www.puritanboard.com/f78/commentary-galatians-john-brown-21166/> (accessed August 2010).

- Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell;
- And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace.<sup>15</sup>

Discipleship is a very large word, never altogether realized. Just as faith leads to faith, and love to love, and light to light, so does discipleship to discipleship. As Bengel says, discipleship is the *fundamentum et fastigium* of Christianity. On earth the vine reveals itself in the branches, and thus conceals itself behind them. “This explains why the diffusion of spiritual life makes such slow progress in the world—the Vine effects nothing but by means of the branches, and these so often paralyze instead of promoting the action of the Vine”<sup>16</sup>

In an effort to explore and get an understanding of the content of discipleship Bonhoeffer in his book, *Cost of Discipleship* asserts that, “The text is straightforward in its teaching on this matter.” The request made by Jesus was, *Follow me*. Following Jesus, that is the *content* of discipleship. In actuality this request points to the fact that there is no content for discipleship in the sense of an established program for a way of life. The believer is taken out of a life of relative security into one of absolute insecurity, or so it seems. But in reality he is brought into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus. At its core, discipleship is exclusive attachment to the person of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

In the next section of chapter two, Bonhoeffer explored Luke 9:57-62 as a source of further understanding the call to discipleship. The first disciple followed Jesus without

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew J. Waskey, *Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses* (<http://www.milestone documents.com/documents /view/martin-luthers-ninety-five-theses/>). (accessed September 2010.)

<sup>16</sup> Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary*.

<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

waiting to be called. Jesus warned the disciple of the costs and with His warning revealed that no man chooses such a life for himself. A man cannot call himself. “The gulf between a voluntary offer to follow and genuine discipleship is clear.” The next disciple wanted to bury his father first. He had become found by the intricacies of the law. A law acts as a barrier between Jesus and the man He called, but the call of Jesus is stronger than any barrier. Bonhoeffer called this a critical moment when nothing however sacred and be permitted to come between Jesus and the person called—not even the law itself. Even the law must be broken for the sake of Jesus. Not even the law must be allowed to be a barrier to discipleship.<sup>18</sup>

The third disciple thought, “Following Christ means he must make the offer on his own initiative, as if it were a career he had mapped out for himself.” He differed from the first in that he was old enough to stipulate his own terms. He saw discipleship as the completion of certain tasks which would reduce discipleship to the level of human understanding. At this point discipleship is no longer discipleship but rather a self-planned and induced program. But true discipleship can tolerate nothing which might come between Jesus and a follower’s obedience. Bonhoeffer asserted that if one is to follow Jesus he or she must take certain steps. Step one separates the disciple from his previous existence. Step one takes the disciple out of the old situation and places him immediately into a new one where faith is possible.<sup>19</sup>

In his book Brueggemann describes evangelism as a drama in three scenes, concerning (1) God’s victory over the forces of chaos and death, (2) the announcement of

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

that victory, and (3) its appropriation by those who hear the announcement. This same dramatic sequenced, as he shows, is many times re-enacted in the Bible; the times and circumstances of the reenactment may differ, but the essential message, as well as the structure of its presentation, remains the same.<sup>20</sup>

The writer believes that in order to be prepared to serve the people of God in the church and the community one must be able to present the three areas (evangelism, mission, and discipleship) discussed in such a way that the outsider, the insider, and the young are transformed to action through Jesus the Christ as explored by Brueggemann and others.

### **Historical**

Alzheimer's disease is a debilitating condition that eventually destroys a person's memory—and through this disease we see how a person cannot function without memory. The same applies for an organization; without a memory the organization is dysfunctional at best, and crippled at worst. John Stackhouse Jr.'s words are worth hearing in this regard:

Historians function as the memory of the church and we know that people who suffer from a lack of memory have terrible problems. So historians help us see what we have done, help us to learn from our mistakes and equip us with a range of options that have already been tried in the past. History doesn't have all the answers just like our memory doesn't have all the answers, but without memory we waste a lot of time.<sup>21</sup>

By helping the church remember its past, church historians contribute to a healthier church. In the same way, churches leaders who help their church

<sup>20</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup>“Sketching the Future,” *Envision* (FALL 2000), 12.

remember its past contribute to a healthier church. There are specific biblical injunctions that compel us to learn from the past.

### Proverbs

The book of Proverbs instructs us to seek after wisdom. The anonymous medieval saying *historia magistra vitae*, (history, teacher of life) expresses well the reality that we can learn how to live by studying the past. A study of the past is, in many ways, a carrying out of the admonitions of Proverbs to seek after wisdom.

Through our study of the past we are seeking to become wise about how to live and serve today.

### 1 Corinthians 10:11

Paul tells us that certain events in the nation of Israel history were written down as warnings for us today. The general principle being, of course, that we need to learn from the mistakes of the past. But how can we learn from the mistakes of the past if we do not study the past?

### Hebrews 11:4

In chapter eleven, the author of the book of Hebrews tried to inspire his faltering readers by listing the many greats of the past. This chapter has been coined the Faith Hall of Fame for in its verses are brief summaries of the lives of such heroes as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon, Samson, David, and Samuel. The specific verse that I would like to draw your attention to is 11:4. In the final sentence of that verse we read that by faith Abel still speaks to us today. The

message is clear: Abel is still speaking, and the others like him in this chapter are still speaking. Our job is to listen. This line reminds me of the movie *The Sixth Sense*. In the movie a young boy named Cole had the ability to see and hear dead people. While most people have five senses (touch, taste, hearing, smell, sight), Cole had a sixth sense: the ability to hear and see dead people. This verse in Hebrews indicates that we, like Cole, can exercise a sixth sense.

The author to the Hebrews does not mean that we are to attempt to communicate with the dead, or listen to some mysterious voices. What is meant is that the example of those listed in this chapter can still speak to us today. If we use our Christian sixth sense—and by faith listen—we will hear their voices, and the voices of those who have lived since that time. To those of us who study history not merely as a warning reminder of man's follies and crimes, but also as an encouraging remembrance of generative souls, the past ceases to be a depressing chamber of horrors; it becomes a celestial city, a spacious country of the mind, wherein a thousand saints, statesmen, inventors, scientists, poets, artists, musicians, lovers, and philosophers still live and speak, teach and carve and sing.<sup>22</sup>

If you enjoy the study of history you will know what Durant means. “When I walk through an archive, I do not just see old faded papers, or dusty records, or tattered publications. When I walk through the aisles of an archive I see in every journal, every sermon, every biography, and every file of personal correspondence the opportunity to hear voices from the past.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 102.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

One author that expresses well this idea is Will Durant. In his book *The Lessons of History*, written after he (with the help of his wife) completed his eleven-volume history of civilization, Durant states that, “We know that biblical writers were themselves interpreters, for the historical-critical method has shown us how writers in both testaments exercised a certain freedom in building upon traditions that they received.

Let us look briefly at several models from the Old and New Testament where interpretation is transpiring within the text itself. These include (1) texts that reenact tradition, (2) texts that have layers of ancient contexts, (3) the contemporary application of a text, and (4) the perennial problem of proof-texts. In both the Old and New Testaments examples abound of what may be called reenactment. For example historical-critical scholars have shown that Deuteronomy is not simply a compilation of laws. Its nature is made clear in the introductory verses. “Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law.”<sup>24</sup>

The Law is being restated and applied to the generation about to enter the land. From the point of view of modern scholarship, this is a patent example of the Deuteronomic school updating and explaining an already ancient tradition in relation to a new situation.<sup>25</sup>

The same point was made by Gerhard von Rad as he exercised his tradition-historical approach to Scripture. He stressed the manner in which Israel remembered the bases of salvation: the covenant with the patriarchs, Sinai, the covenant with

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<sup>24</sup> Dt 1:5.

<sup>25</sup>Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1991).

David, and the establishment of the special status of Zion. All of these bases of salvation were reenacted and reinterpreted in the context of worship in order to confront new events in the acts of God toward God's people. The same process of interpretation and reinterpretation transpired within the New Testament. The writers took traditions and shaped them according to their own contexts. For example, the New Testament writers, who were dedicated to Jesus, exercised a new freedom in their use of the traditions that they had received. Let us look briefly at a Pauline model within the New Testament.<sup>26</sup>

Paul, a mere two decades removed from Jesus, discovered that the tradition of Jesus' teaching about marriage was not sufficient to deal with the specifics of the Corinthian problem. In 1 Corinthians 7, he cannot simply repeat the command of the Lord but must also use his own considered judgment. On matters of divorce, Paul said, "Not I but the Lord".<sup>27</sup> He quoted the prohibition against divorce that is found also in Mark 10:29. Yet Paul makes some concessions. An unbelieving partner had a right to ask for divorce. Married Christians should not divorce, but if they did, there should be no remarriage.

His counsel is derived from bringing the tradition of Jesus' command into direct relationship with the complex problems in Corinth.<sup>28</sup> This Pauline model commends itself to us in our interpretation of Scripture. Paul tried to ascertain which understanding took seriously both the tradition and the special situation with which he was faced. Unafraid to take personal responsibility, he regarded himself as accountable to his risen and living Sovereign. Paul could, then, use traditions in a creative manner because of the freedom that he

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>1 Co 7:10.

<sup>28</sup>Felder, *Stony the Road*.

had experienced in the risen Lord. Likewise, the contemporary interpreter, though bound by Scripture, tradition, and commitment to the risen Lord, is also free to make judgments in light of the present situation.

Those employing the historical-critical method can discern how Paul refused to give exegetical warrant for what the Corinthians were doing. By following and adapting Paul's method one might, in a measure, avoid becoming merely an ideological interpreter of the tradition and avoid a tendency toward interpretative stagnation.

Let us now consider another type of interpretation, namely, that Hound in the layers of contexts within and behind a given text. Finding the context of specific passages can get rather complicated. Take, for example, the Sermon on the Mount; it is a collection of diverse materials compiled and edited by the writer of Matthew's Gospel. The literary context of any given teaching within the sermon is, therefore, chapters 5-7, and the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.

Similarly, the situational and cultural background of the sermon is Matthew's own day, the latter decades of the first century. The theological context is also supplied by the Gospel itself, but we cannot stop there. We must place specific sayings of Jesus in the sermon in the situational and cultural context of Jesus' own ministry and in the theological context of Jesus' own proclamation of the kingdom of God. If, therefore, the church is going so reclaim the Sermon on the Mount for today, it must also reclaim its multiple contexts or the text itself does not "live."<sup>29</sup>

In Scripture we find our predecessors in the faith struggling to hear, to interpret, and to obey God's Word in the midst of the realities and demands of the times and places in which they lived. They offer us no ready-made answers for the specifics of the issues and situations

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

we face today. They do, however, offer us the witness of their faith, of their experience of God's gift and claim, of their commitment to understand the meaning of the gift and claim, and of their endeavor to be responsive to God's call in the midst of their world.

If interpretation is a part of the internal operation of the canon itself, as the historical-critical method has shown, what is the interpretative task for today? How can texts written thousands of years ago in ancient Israel speak to the life of faith of a twentieth-century person? That is the problem of hermeneutics. The more specifically relevant a biblical teaching was for its own time, place, and circumstances, the less specifically relevant it is apt to be for our time, place, and circumstances. The logic of this proposition is clear enough, but we seldom take time to think it through. Some interpreters would prefer merely to ignore the literary, cultural, and theological context of a text and resort to the arbitrary use of allegorical, proof-textual, typological, and analogical modes of biblical interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

It is through the historical use of Scripture that Ronson sees the act of preparing to serve the people of God in mission, evangelism, and discipleship is not a new thing but an existing part of the gospel. In sharing the stories of the Old and New Testament he has found a guide in the Scriptures to lead the people of God and those not in the church to a better understanding of bringing people to Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

### **Theoretical**

In order to reach God's people, we must speak the language of culture. In order to transform God's people we must speak the language of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This model of ministry is termed empowerment because it emphasizes spiritual, cultural, and

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

social transformation as bases for church growth and development. The primary purpose of the empowerment church is saving souls—having a genuine conversion experience and positively and permanently changing lives for the good of Christ and the community. The essence of empowerment, then, is the power to change and be changed spiritually; the capacity to be recipients and catalysts of positive spiritual and social transformation in all areas of black life in America.

Jesus' ministry was certainly one of empowerment. A central axiom of Jesus' ministry was that he unequivocally and positively changed lives for the better by calling people who were conflicted and afflicted into a profound realization of their spiritual resources. In addition, Jesus made them aware of their God-centered potential, which not only forever changed their lives, but also the communities in which they lived.

Inherent in his ministry was a process of empowerment actualized through personal intervention and spiritual transformation. Whether touching, healing, rebuking, exhorting, preaching, teaching, or reaching, Jesus' ministry had great impact on the people of his time. This ministry of outreach and love, which invariably awakened within the individual awareness of God's transformative and redemptive grace, compelled the afflicted into deeper awareness of the true power of God in their lives. No longer were they simply the passive recipients of God's miraculous intercession, but instead they brought others to Christ through the credence and efficacy of their apostolic witness and the power of the Holy Spirit. They too, after touching and being with Jesus, could envision themselves as agents of transformation and spiritual grace and power. Any

previous notions of human failings and frailties that stifled potential were eclipsed after an encounter with Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, Jesus' ministry heralded the redemptive possibilities of human community. His ministry of transformation and empowerment was actualized ultimately for the restoration of the human community, bringing oneness with God and wholeness with others. The sense of wholeness and fulfillment Jesus conferred upon the afflicted was designed to bring them back into the community from which they had been estranged. This wholeness and oneness that they experienced grew out of a longing for spiritual growth and empowerment.<sup>32</sup>

Spiritual empowerment thus enabled the individual to exceed his or her greatest self-expectations. Whereas community empowerment gauged how well the individual was able to reestablish himself or herself within the larger society and how well the spiritual principles that had been learned were translated into community transformation, individual healing and redemption ultimately led to the transformation and empowerment of the social collective as a unifying and totalizing force for positive change. In Jesus' ministry, individual empowerment always had larger communal ramifications.<sup>33</sup>

At the heart of all empowerment is *spiritual growth* and *faith*. Accordingly, present-day church empowerment models must equally benefit the communities they serve. Not only is it important for *individuals* to be transformed, healed, redeemed, and restored,

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<sup>31</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2001).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

but they must also translate the power actualized individually through their encounter with Christ into the collective meliorations of community. No longer is it enough to simply run and shout and be healed and have the Holy Ghost on Sunday morning. The ultimate question becomes: How do we translate that power of awareness, vitality, and transcendence into the radical transformation of community? Empowerment processes facilitate such transformation. The central objectives of Jesus' ministry were to:

- positively transform people's lives by connecting them with their most important spiritual resources
- increase their knowledge, faith, and awareness of God's possibilities through their own actualized potential
- empower them to translate that awareness into meaningful action within the larger human community<sup>34</sup>

He achieved this through basic spiritual teaching, training, and witness by emphasizing fundamentals or basic foundational principles. The extent to which the afflicted within the community realized their potential was the point at which the larger community actualized its own potential as a collective entity. This gave the early followers of the way enormous momentum and power. Their ability to interpret and translate that redemptive, transformative awareness through Christ into human community has made Christianity a vital force for spiritual and social change for the past twenty centuries.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus' ministry changed people, things, and conditions. It transformed the social and religious order, the moral trajectory of the universe, and ultimately, the course of

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

human history. No life could remain dormant or indifferent after an encounter with Christ. Moreover, the lives he changed also changed others, for a central tenet of being a follower of the way is not only to be touched by Christ, to experience deep and enduring change within, but also to touch others in his name.”<sup>36</sup>

Les Mangum writes in the seventh chapter of the book, *Growing the African American Church* of a method of church growth through back-door ministry. The idea is rooted in the approach that Jesus took to develop his ministry. During the first century A. D., the synagogue and the temple resembled the traditional church of today. There were many instances when Jesus taught and healed at both locations. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and other religious leaders often greeted Jesus' efforts to develop his ministries with resentment and challenges.

The resulting conflicts would not support an environment in which Jesus could teach his disciples to share the good news that the salvation of the world had come. Hence, Jesus left the traditional locations of religious teaching and went out into the highways and byways of Israel to call his disciples. Back-Door Ministries are an approach to reaching out today to people who would be less likely to come into the front door of many traditional churches.

The hope of the Back-Door Ministry is to create an environment where people, who may feel uncomfortable in a traditional church setting, can hear the good news interpreted to them in ways that they understand. It should be an environment where people can raise issues and concerns about the religiosity of the church. Some people have avoided the traditional church because they wrongly perceived the church as a place only for saints, not sinners. Such a perception would naturally cause persons who have fallen

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 23.

into sin and vice to shy away. The Back-Door Ministry environment is one in which the leaders of a traditional church can interact with people who may have false perceptions of the church. This approach helps convert impediments into stepping-stones by winning the hearts and minds of those who may have felt left out.

### The Growth of Jesus' Ministry Begins with a Back-Door Approach

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.<sup>37</sup>

Jesus called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, from their vocations as fishermen. When they heard the call of Jesus, they left their nets and followed him. The craft of fishing had been the basis of their survival. Their parents trained them to cast their nets into the sea to catch fish, the sustenance of their lives. They were tried and tested by unpredictable storms on the Sea of Galilee. They learned to persist against the adversity of the sea to draw on its resources. They responded to the call of Jesus by leaving their vocations and following him, as symbolized by leaving their nets behind.

These four disciples went with Christ in anticipation of discovering a new vocation. They left the trade of their fathers to follow Jesus in eager expectation that they might find

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<sup>37</sup>Mt 4:18-22.

satisfaction for their young, restless spirits, which rose far beyond the limitations of human endeavors. Undoubtedly, Jesus had awakened the hidden desire within them to do more than satisfy the need for physical sustenance. They went with Jesus seeking to satisfy the indomitable curiosity of their minds, to learn the true meaning of life, to renew their spirits, and to find peace for their souls. These four disciples left fishing with little awareness that their vocation symbolized the intent of Jesus' ministry. They were the *first fish* drawn by Jesus to be taught to fish for others in need of salvation.

The author believes that Christ continues to call disciples into a personal relationship with God through him—a personal relationship enriched, unfolded, and understood through reaching out to the community. Christ's call to these four who leave their way of living behind to follow Jesus. Through following Jesus, they would discover a new life of joy, peace, commitment, and purpose.

We have all left many different walks of life to walk with Jesus. All of us must be like those called before us and anticipate learning to become fishers of people through ministries of community outreach according to the needs and circumstances of our communities.”<sup>38</sup>

Dr. A. Skevington Wood writes in his book, *The Ground Plan of Evangelism*, a noticeable and recurring feature of most modern programmers of evangelism as set out by the national churches both here in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe is the assumption that mission must needs be geared to the parochial pattern. The ground plan of evangelism is taken that have been written on the subject. Many of them owe their original inspiration to the report of the Commission on Evangelism published in 1945 under the title, *Towards the Conversion of England*—a landmark in the strategy of mission in this country. In its

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<sup>38</sup>Stewart, *Growing the African American Church*, 85.

necessary insistence that the Church itself is the agent of evangelism it was inevitable that, thinking in purely domestic terms, the parish should be regarded as the basis of operations. Most Anglican literature that has appeared since then on this topic has presupposed the parochial orientation of evangelism.

Dr. Joost de Blank, who wrote *The Parish in Action* in 1954 when he was Bishop of Stepney, launches into his opening chapter with a plea for the parish. His argument is rightly founded upon the nature of evangelism itself as the continuing witness of the Church. ‘In recent years,’ he wrote, “there has been any amount of talk about evangelism, as if evangelism were something that could be tacked on to the normal life of the Church. Not so! Evangelism *is* the normal life of the Church, and can never be an optional extra. It is of the essence of the Church, and the Church in the traditional use of that word are called from time to time, but only to reap the harvest of a seed that is faithfully and continuously sown, never as something new to which the church and its people are compelled as a strange and exceptional exercise.” From this incontrovertible premise he proceeds to press the case for the parish as the unit of evangelism. The same stress is to be discovered in the writings of Canon Southcott, Canon Lloyd and Canon Green.<sup>39</sup>

The parallel movement north of the border is similarly related to the parochial system. In outlining the general principles of mission in one of its earliest publications, *Tell Scotland* laid down first of all that ‘the key to evangelism today lies with the parish or local congregation’. It is here that it must be realized that effective missions not an occasional or sporadic effort undertaken by a specialist, but a continuous and coherent pattern of life within the local church.

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<sup>39</sup> Skevington A. Wood, *The Ground Plan Of Evangelism* [http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/tsf.bulletin/vol29/29\\_wood.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/tsf.bulletin/vol29/29_wood.pdf) (accessed December 2010).

“Our main concern today is not so much with planning a parish mission, as with planning a missionary parish. Special missions, Commando campaigns, house-to-house visitation carried out from time to time—these things may have their own contribution to make. But in the last resort it is the congregation living its faith which is the true agent of mission.’ The pioneer and architect of ‘*Tell Scotland*’ was Tom Allan. It is not without significance that the title of his most widely influential book is *The Face of my Parish*. Once again the ground plan of evangelism is assumed to be the parochial area. If the conception of the parish as the unit of activity can be sustained within the wider orbit of united effort, well and good; but to the degree in which it is found to hinder or restrict such over-all co-operation, it must be abandoned or modified. There is real need nowadays to rethink the entire strategy of evangelism from the standpoint not of the parish but of the total community of committed Christians. Remarkable enough, this in fact corresponds with the original conception of the local Christian church as a parish.

The term *paroikia* was employed in the secular realm to describe those who dwelt alongside the recognized citizens—either aliens living within the city or those who occupied the suburbs and hamlets beyond the boundaries. Long before the primitive Church began to organize itself on parochial lines as we understand today (this development was one of the features that emerged along with distinct episcopacy at the end of the dark ’tunnel’ which runs through most of the second century), the Christian community was regarded as a *paroikia* in the sense that it represented a colony of heaven on earth. “The *paroikia* of early days,” according to Edwin Hatch, “was neither a parish nor a diocese, but the community of Christians living within a city or a district, regarded in relation to the non-“Christian population which surrounded it.”

The parish, then, was the fellowship of strangers and pilgrims in the midst of a pagan society. It could well be that if we were to reconsider the nature of the Christian parish in these terms; a solution to the problem raised in this brief excursus might appear more probable.”<sup>40</sup>

This theory asserted by Dr. Wood and others demonstrates to us that the issue of evangelism and mission is not a new phenomenon. The Church, since inception, has had to deal with how to continue the work of God through the people of God in church and community to provide a continuous teaching of the life of Jesus Christ and the making of disciples.

## **Theology**

Men and women; young and old, telling stories of God intervening in their lives—this is the Christian story alive in flesh and blood! For the black church steeped in oral tradition, telling the story is the hallmark of a distinctive evangelistic lifestyle.

Describing tradition as “a womb for the creation of new ideas,” Stallings challenges today’s black Christians to recapture the power and vision of their rich evangelistic heritage. In a concise overview of religious movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he highlights social, political, cultural, and religious influences through which the black churches of America emerged as separate and independent entities. He explores how religious experiences of Afro-Americans, who saw themselves as a chosen people, created an evangelizing-caring, supportive family that uses storytelling and story listening as a primary evangelistic methods. He also examines the influences of urban life and television on the future ministries of black churches and their story.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Stallings urges churches to reflect on how they now do ministry, how they can empower and equip persons to renew the living tradition—and to tell their stories.<sup>41</sup>

Theologically, the church as a sign of the Reign of God found in Jesus' ministry an important model for mission practice and theology. For a significant time, many Christian communities took the motto Mission in Christ's way to reflect and engage in mission activity, whether overseas or domestic. The Lord's Prayer, a synthesis of Jesus' mission focusing on the centrality of God's activity in the world, was studied in the missionary and ecumenical movements and became a fresh, but at times controversial, missionary proposal. It was clear that the musicological shift had gone from an ecclesiocentric approach, to a theocentric, Reign-of-God- driven theology of mission.

Did these changes ever touch local congregations? Did mission theologies and practices change in Christian congregations? The author believes that to a certain extent congregations, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, or Orthodox, have gained a new language and perspective. Even if they might have an ecclesiocentric view of mission, this view was challenged by other proposals such as the one described above. It is difficult to evaluate the level of awareness and integration of these missiological changes. There are so many factors that either contribute or impede a Christian community to be up-to-date in mission theologies and practices. Moreover, though many acquired the new language—Reign of God, mission in Christ's way and so forth—many continue to be confused and ambiguous, in captivity, to their practices and theologies of mission.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>James O. Stallings, *Telling the Story: Evangelism In Black Churches* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988).

<sup>42</sup>Carddoza Orlandi, F. Caarlos, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

What would a theology of the church look like that took seriously the fact that North America is now itself a mission field? This question lies at the foundation of this volume written by an ecumenical team of six noted missiologists—Lois Barrett, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Darrell L. Guder, George R. Hunsberger, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Craig Van Geider. The result of a three-year research project undertaken by The Gospel and Our Culture Network, this book issues a firm challenge for the church to recover its missional call right here in North America. The authors examine today's secular culture and the church's loss of dominance in contemporary society. They then present a biblically based theology that takes seriously the church's missional vocation and draw out the consequences of this theology for the structure and institutions of the church.

North America as a mission field—the idea sounds strange to North American Christians who associate ‘mission’ and ‘missions’ with something that happens in other parts of the world. Yet this splendid book of essays is a clarion call for the church to recognize its radically different cultural and theological situation at the end of the twentieth century and to redefine and reform its understanding of its identity and direction. This is required reading for anyone concerned about the future of the church on this continent.<sup>43</sup>

Mercy Oduyoye has been extremely helpful in creating a missiology for Africa that is both socially relevant and culturally authentic. Hers is the story of an African Christian leader with missiological vision for new life and liberation in the African church. Throughout her ministry as an international lecturer, researcher, author and World Council of Churches leader, she has attempted to give some understanding of the Church's purpose and mission in the context of tradition and modernity in Africa.

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<sup>43</sup>Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

Her keynote address to the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly plenary (the first time in history an address was presented by a woman entitled *Troubled Nut Not Destroyed* and her resource paper also presented during the assembly entitled *The Church of the Future, Its Mission and Theology*, along with her previous books contain the mature and creative reflections of a woman of singular achievement calling for unchaining our minds as relates to issues of mission, church and ministry.

By raising the fundamental question? Den mmusu na yaabo?" (What has happened to us?), Oduyoye presents paramount reasons why it is necessary for the church to deliberately and urgently address key concerns related to the identity and purpose of the church in Africa if it is to stay alive, and become well enough to adequately meet both contemporary as well as future challenges. This ability to engage in an introspective self-examination is required of every church in every location on planet earth, and of every generation. Oduyoye's voice therefore is critical and crucial today in terms of the particular challenges facing the African Church internally as well as in relationship to other Christian and religious communions within the larger global landscape.<sup>44</sup>

The purpose of the church, says Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, is simple: the church exists to bring people to salvation in Christ, and to positively and permanently change lives for the good of the community. The way the church fulfills this basic calling is through empowerment; endowing people with the capacity to be recipients and catalysts of positive social and personal change. Too many churches in North America have neglected this basic calling, argues Stewart in, *The Empowerment Church*. If they are to become thriving centers

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<sup>44</sup>Ronald Edward Peters and Marsha Snelligan Haney, *Africentric Approaches to Christian Ministry; Strengthening Urban Congregations in African American Communities* (New York, NY: University Press of America, Inc., 2006).

of personal and social transformation, then they must move beyond the dichotomy of ministry of either saving souls or transforming society. Rather, they must work to empower the whole person through ministries that work at the same time for spiritual, relational, and communal transformational Only when they thus empower individuals to be disciples of Jesus Christ in ways that then transform those individuals' personal relations and the communities in which they live, will the church fulfill its basic calling.<sup>45</sup>

Through his research Ronsonn has found that in order to Prepare the Table and Congregation for Wholistic Community Growth, by doing ‘In Reach, before Out Reach , the Biblical, Historical, Theoretical, and Theological foundations must, “reflect how Scripture informs life, our work and how we are to live together in community.”<sup>46</sup> To god be the glory!

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<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *The Empowerment Church*.

<sup>46</sup> A. Washington, *Instructions on How to Prepare Foundation Papers*. August Peer Session, Atlanta, Georgia 2009.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures of the research used to prepare context associates for the opportunity presented to them in the areas of evangelism, mission, and discipleship. The problem statement that supports this research is that of preparing the church, congregation, to go out into the community for holistic growth; In Reach before Out Reach; preparing the Table for holistic growth within the church and community, through evangelism, mission, and discipleship. Action research provides the researcher and context associates the best method of collaboration that will allow them to reach the desired knowledge to carry out this project.

#### **Research Design**

The researcher used qualitative analysis, which included interviews, surveys, observations, and evaluations for data collection. The ethnographic approach allows the researcher to study the culture of the context in which the project is located which would include the immediate community and church of the 30310 area zip code of the metro Atlanta, Georgia, known as Oakland City. By using the participant observation approach,

the researcher will be able to record field notes and interact with active participants throughout the six week process.<sup>1</sup>

One three hour workshop, six sermons, and six weeks of related Bible studies were used to check and increase the knowledge while educating the context associates on the holistic growth of church and community as they related to the use of evangelism, mission, and discipleship.

The ministry focus was to ready the context associates to share the good news of the Gospel without the anxiety that the researcher felt when first met with the opportunity to relate his experience of accepting Jesus Christ into his life and later his heart. Being able to share one's experience of accepting Jesus Christ in his/her life helps in talking with others when inviting them to try Jesus.

As a member and pastor of the United Methodist Church, the researcher understands its mission of "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." It is the purpose of the project to put into place at this context a method of readying the church and its context associates for present and future congregations and the community. The church's fixation on church growth may easily blur the reasons for the church's existence. The church becomes the church's mission. The people whom God loves slip out of focus. Jesus' warned, "For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."<sup>2</sup> Evangelism is the work of the entire people of God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A Judges Deskbook on the Basic Philosophies and Methods of Science. Chapter 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Pgs. 41-47.

<sup>2</sup>Mt 16:25.

<sup>3</sup>Clinton M. Marsh, *Evangelism IS...*(Louisville, KY: Geneva Press), 21.

In his book, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth*, Carlyle Fielding Stewart III states, maintain churches is not particularly problematic in itself, churches within United Methodism and other mainstream Protestant denominations must begin reenvisioning and reconfiguring themselves by developing more relevant and viable ministries that speak to the whole person by addressing their emotional, spiritual, social, environmental, ,vocational, educational, political, economic, cultural, familial, and institutional needs. The gospel calls us to grow. We grow by offering people something of value and by cultivating spiritual and practical resources that will enable them to become change agents in their homes, families, and communities. Churches can ill afford to have for-members-only, country-club approaches to ministry or simply cultivate narcissistic, navel-gazing theologies that are always inward looking and never outward reaching.<sup>4</sup>

### **Objectives**

After sharing with the congregation the project that the pastor/researcher wanted to put into action and the approval by the congregation, the researcher asked for volunteers that wanted to participate as context associates. These volunteers were asked to participate in a workshop that would provide education and offer resources to be used in the preparation process. The long term objective of the workshop is to find methods of evangelism, mission, and discipleship that would be put in place for present and future use as guides to maintaining church and community interaction. The short term goal is to ready the context associates to go out into the community to share the good news.

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<sup>4</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 18.

### **Instructional Model**

The ministry model was made up of six sermons and six weeks of bible study that were relevant to the scriptures used in the sermons. The bible studies consisted of question and answer sessions and dialogue between facilitator and associates. These sessions gave the participants an opportunity to discuss how they saw different ways used to engage in evangelism during the days of biblical life. There were also surveys handed out to the congregation to collect data concerning how to use evangelism, mission, and discipleship in our Christian walk today.

### **Participants**

An invitation was extended to anyone that wanted to participate and prepare themselves for outreach and readying to share their gospel experience. Pulpit ministers were encouraged to participate as well as other church leaders.

### **Project Site**

As pastor in charge of the New Oakland City United Methodist Church, the researcher chose his church assignment and community as the project site.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

#### **Professional Associates and Context Associates**

Professional and Context Associates were chosen by the researcher according to their field of study and the ability to help people of all walks of life.

The areas of evangelism, mission, and discipleship require persons to be able to express themselves through their social context. Communication helps shape the message that is to be proclaimed and plays a major role in keeping those that receive the revelation of the eternal God in Jesus Christ understand the event as it takes place in their lives.

#### **Professional Associates**

The professional associates chosen by the researcher are three of the very best in their areas of expertise. Reverend Lisa Allen, Ph.D. will serve as a consultant in the area of worship and church education as we prepare the congregation to go forth into the community. Reverend Willie F. Goodman Jr. Th.D. will guide the researcher in the areas of spirituality, pastoral care, and the psychology of religion. Edye Simpson, Ph.D. will aid the researcher as an administrative consultant and help develop ways to present the project effectively with skills in communication and team building.

All three professional associates have extensive knowledge in the field of research and will be instrumental in giving assistance in critiquing work presented by the researcher.

### **Context Associates**

The context associates were chosen because of their ability to work with the varied backgrounds. Five of the associates are college level graduates working in law enforcement, administration, education, and social work and two have masters in religion as Christian Educators and Pastoral Care. The remaining five have different levels of employment that deal with interacting with people on a consistent basis with varied contextual backgrounds. All context associates are able and capable of taking from their respective disciplines to enable them to be effective in carrying out the goal of the project the researcher is presenting.

### **Stepping Out**

The leadership of the mentors of our group, Dr. Donnell J. Moore and Dr. Angela D. Washington, told us day one of this experience to *trust the process*. Doing just that has brought our group through what seemed liked rough times; death of loved ones, sickness of self and family, opportunities in writing guided by the Turabian style, and personal growth in understanding each other as group members and individuals. The group dimension as set up by the mentors starting us out in a covenant context which brought individuals together and formed relationships that will never be broken, because we work as one trusting the process. The preparation that went into readying the Intensives by the

United Theological Seminary administrative leaders and staff from daily plenary to financial aid, the feeling of family rather than school has made this journey from Phase I through Phase IV one that has been a pleasure to travel. Now as I step out on faith to present the remaining phase, I give God the glory for all things accomplished as we move forward trusting the process to the end.

Stepping out was a blessing to the researcher and the congregation, because it gave an opportunity to share ownership in the project as it was being prepared. As pastor of the New Oakland City United Methodist Church, it was not assumed by the pastor that the congregation would accept this endeavor just because the pastor presented it. The author began by explaining what he saw that was needed for the church and asked if they also felt that need, and if so, would they consider working with the researcher to prepare the pastor and the church congregants first, and then go out into the community to make disciples of Jesus Christ through evangelism and mission. After a collective yes the researcher began on his Journey from the Pool.

The researcher began in the month of August to set the project in motion. He first met with the professional associates and explained what he was about to embark on and asked that they would incorporate suggestions that would aid in the success of the project. It was suggested that the professional associates would be contacted by the researcher as he saw the need as the work progressed during the gathering of information. The researcher agreed and presented the professional associates a calendar or proposed timeline established for the doctoral project. The second two weeks of August the researcher met with the ministerial staff of the church to address their role in the process. From this meeting the pastor was given a few suggestions on how to move forward in

gathering information and how to find what was needed before that collection of data started. The suggestion was made that an assessment of the church would serve as a means of knowing all areas of the church that needed attention and would serve as a guide for the researcher for future projects that would help in the maintenance of the complete church while church growth and evangelism would be a great beginning for both the community and the church.

The suggestions given by the ministerial staff were indeed helpful. They led to the choosing of the context associates that were to be used and conducting interviews with the group of people that volunteered and drafted. As the interviews were taking place, a workshop was planned to help the participants get a better understanding of what would be expected of them as they proceeded to ready themselves for a great work. Dr. Donnell J. Moore was to be the facilitator of the workshop preparing the participants to understand the role that leadership plays in the stability of a church. It was also suggested that a Bible study series would begin in September that would include Scriptures that are related to evangelism, mission, and discipleship. After each week or the completion of the Scripture chosen, there would be a question and answer sheet to be filled out to test the understanding gathered from that particular Scripture.

## **Workshop**

During the month of September, a workshop; A Coaching Moment; Re-Thinking, Re-Doing, and Re-Growing Our Churches, facilitated by Dr. Donnell J. Moore, was shared by context associates and other members of the church congregation to help guide us as we moved forward with our project.

There are two perspectives that were gleaned from this coaching moment; what church is in our minds and secondly what God intended it to be. As persons of the church we have to get from where we are in understanding the church to where and what God intended for the church. In order for the church to function effectively, there must be an understanding of the tension that exists between the two.

The Re-thinking, re-doing, and re-growing our churches helps us to look at areas in which we as representatives of the church improve on the ideas that are already in place giving the opportunity to move forward rather than being stuck in one place. Establishing new ideas that will incorporate all the views and thoughts of new and seasoned members helps us move towards a better church. The group learned that we must be able to think over what's different about us and see those things that are indicators which will move us towards new and better ways of functioning in the church; Doing it over until things change for the better.

We must be able to revise, turn ourselves inside out, in an effort to visualize what I do for the Kingdom of God. There should always be the knowledge of understanding that we can not expect to hold someone to standards that we do not have for ourselves. There has to be a rejuvenation or rebirth in order to continue to grow after injury or interruption.

Dr. Moore helped us to see that there will be times when conflict and control threaten our interest. But we should come away from those moments knowing these things happen when person have things in common. If we have mutuality we can agree to disagree, it resolves the conflict. In order to get our Churches to where God wants us, we have to be able to re-think, re-do, and re-grow.

We also learned that there is a model that we as a church should find it impossible to exist without; the model of leadership found in the Bible concerning the Shepherd and the sheep. After the discussion it was discovered that there are important sheep needed to grow the herd to continue the growth of the church. Every role is necessary for the uplifting of the Kingdom of God. Working together makes it possible.

### **Bible Study**

The purpose sought after by the researcher during bible study: as the scriptures chosen were presented by the researcher were being discussed, the explanation or commentary that is used to describe what is taking place in the scripture begins to come alive by the help of the Holy Spirit, in those persons participating in bible study as the Word is exegesis for understanding. The experience of the participant and the scriptures align and the story in the scripture becomes parallel with that of the participant's own life and the scriptures live again.

At this point the researcher is able to engage in dialogue with the participant and together, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they develop a way of understanding how to tell/share their story with those they meet inside or outside of the church as they become evangelist for the Lord. Telling the good news is best done, as the researcher believes, when the person sharing their experience of Jesus Christ has a relationship with Jesus Christ and the engagement of the two becomes an experience for the one being evangelized.

The Correlationist, an apologetic approach used to show how to relate the Word of God to the sociocultural context, believed that experience of life and the study of

scripture went hand-in-hand with understanding the scriptures. John Wesley also was a proponent of this approach, as viewed by the researcher, may have used it to formulate his quadrilateral theory sighting reason, experience, tradition, and scripture; with scripture as the primary source, to develop a way for new voices to be heard in the Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

### **Questions from Bible Study/ Sermons**

There were six sermons chosen to guide bible study and create dialogue. These sermons were also used to give examples of how persons of the bible were chosen to work in the areas of evangelism, mission, and discipleship. Bible study discussion on the sermon was done the week after the delivery of the sermon. The context associates in bible study would ask questions as they related to the three areas used for the project. (Evangelism, mission, discipleship) If no questions came from the floor, the researcher would guide the discussion by asking the appropriate questions. The questions below represent how the bible study was guided. The dialogue that came from the sermon reflection would help/aid the context associates in their understanding of what they would be involved in as they began to go out into the community. It was the researcher's intention that the sermons and the study of said sermons would give the context associates an idea of what telling the good news was about.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Edward Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

## Questions

1. How is Jesus able to change my life?
2. Will Jesus continue to pursue me if I'm not able to be reached?
3. Do you think you were dispatched by God?
4. What is spiritual enlightenment?
5. In my daily walk, what are the different ways to know that God is truly working in my life?
6. What is God's will in our lives?
7. How do you walk by faith?
8. How do we determine what problems are sent by God?
9. Does God send problems to test our faith?
10. What problems did Ruth encounter in her life to seek God's guidance?
11. What is the goodness of God's blessings?
12. Is God selective in the blessings bestowed upon His people?
13. What is good news?
14. How do we express the saying, "God is good, all the time God is good" to those persons that are not in a good place in their life?
15. What is meant by the Scripture of 1 Peter 1: 3? The promise of a new birth. How does this relate to the goodness of God?

After the bible study had been completed and the group had heard the sermons that related, what were the findings as the context associates responded? Of those responding, 20% did not relate the sermon or the bible study to any of the tools of evangelism, mission, and discipleship. It was this group's view that the sermon did help them in the

week following, but the help was to their personal lives. 30% of the context associates were able to connect two of the tools; mission and discipleship from the bible study but not the sermons.

Approximately 45% of the chosen group was able to associate the sermon and bible study to the tools used; evangelism, mission, and discipleship. This group felt that the discussions or dialogue that took place in bible study helped them to understand the sermons and the tools that would be used as we prepared to go out into the community.

Over 5% of the target group was completely turned off when they heard the term evangelism. The members of this group felt that they would have to go out and preach to the people of the community. It was the consensus of the group that the sermons were examples of what they would have to do for the people of the community. After dialogue with this group the researcher found that this understanding of evangelism had been with them a long time as they moved from church to church.

Redefining the term and sharing between the group members seemed to ease their pain of just hearing the word and there could be a possibility of recruiting from this group to go out and listen and watch as a start.

The researcher found that 95% of the context associates responded better to dialogue in the group setting. He also saw an increase in the number of people attending Sunday school and bible study after this study was over.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Reflection**

Like the Gathering, the Going Forth is an act of corporate worship as long as people are still with other people in the place of worship. The Order of Worship usually has in place during this time an offer or invitation to become a part of this congregation to do the work of Jesus in this place and into the world. After the invitation, extinguishing of candles and carrying out of the light (to symbolize the light of Christ leading us out into the world), to go forth and serve is the beginning of evangelism, mission, and discipleship.

The researcher believes that the work of each member of the congregation is to accept this act as carrying the Word out to the people so that they may hear the good news. This sharing and going out into the world (community) for the researcher is the start of evangelism and discipleship that he saw needed in the congregation he now serves. This act found in the Great Expectation, in Matthew 28:18-20, also known as the Great Commission is not an option, says” Carlyle F. Stewart III; it is the Lord’s expectation”. As a church we are to grow and produce more disciples who are willing to transform the world.

What was discovered by the researcher is that measuring your accomplishments may not show up until later in the ministry. The seeds that are planted and watered will

only yield the product that God sees that should be increased. This is not discouraging to the author because this plan belongs to God in God's time to make it happen for this church and community. The need for a plan to be in place and a method by which it can materialize is what brought this project forward. The need to continue to work towards growing God's people along with the church and not find ourselves serving the institution represented to show numbers and pew fillers.

Working with others and trying to get them to see the best way, in the researcher's opinion, to share their story of accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and becoming disciples for Christ enables them to create a holistic approach that deals with the whole person to whom they witness and testify. The congregants are to be real with those that are encountered as they meet them where they are in their lives at any given time as the need presents itself. We want to bring people into the church expecting to bring them into a relationship with Jesus Christ not just for membership but also to Christian discipleship.

The researcher sees this project as a road map that will help offer a paradigm shift moving persons towards example rather than conversation. Sharing the story offers the new person to possibly see themselves through the Scriptures as did the disciples that are guiding them through their journey to an alternative life in Christ Jesus.

Working through the fear that was expressed by context associates was the biggest obstacle to try and overcome. The researcher uses the term "try", because there were some that took on another way of interacting with those that were coming into the church as new members and eventually new disciples. Some served as persons that were yoked (putting an old member with a new member to help guide and introduce the new

member to the church) with the new workers as they became active in the church through new members class, introducing them to the choir, the ushers, and other ministries in the church.

The problem statement also had the term preparation or readying the congregation to take on this task. Preparation through workshops, bible study and sermons were great ways to interact with the context associates and find out what they saw in each as they got ready to go forth, but the researcher found that the dialogue that was created by sitting down and having the participants give their individual thoughts about the methods used to prepare them was the most affective. The associates discovered that they all had similar if not equal stories that were very interesting as they interacted and shared how they came to Christ. And what is keeping them in Christ as they continue to grow as Christians.

Being the facilitator of this project helped the researcher to see the need to continue to ready himself as pastor/shepherd of a Great group of people that were willing to put their lives out on the table to be served to the unchurched people of God. A new strength was discovered as he worked to share with others how to give of themselves to people they not only did not know, but did not know how they would be received. A way of discovering what faith really is in this walk with God.

One of the greatest lessons learned was how to listen and not interrupt, to begin sharing before the new person had finished sharing where they were in their life. Being respectful of the persons we were interacting with rather than wanting to tell my story.

The project found me, and it gave me a better understanding of this vocation.  
To god be the glory!

## **Conclusion**

Leadership of a congregation requires a clearly defined and well organized plan for ministry. The plan for ministry arises out of the needs of the church, the needs of the community, the goals and the resources of the congregation, and the demands of the gospel. Ministry has a triadic structure: Christ, congregation, community.

The plan for ministry gives systematic expression to the congregation's mission to the community in the name of Christ. The work of the congregation focuses in two directions: toward the community and toward the congregation. The church ministers to human needs wherever it finds them. In the process, it attracts numerous persons to its life and must, therefore, find ways to cultivate and invite those persons to participate in the fellowship of Christ.

A plan of ministry must answer five simple and basic questions:

1. What will we do? (the objectives)
2. How will we do it? (the strategies)
3. When will we do it? (the time line)
4. Who will be responsible for doing the task? (the team)
5. How will we evaluate the action? (the evaluation)

When you have answered these questions, you will have developed a comprehensive plan of ministry. The plan permits the whole church to know the goals of ministry and how they will be achieved.

The church of Jesus Christ must reach out to new persons and incorporate them into its life. In the first place, God wills that every individual be given an opportunity to hear the good news and respond to it. Second, persons outside a community of faith often

suffer from emptiness, loneliness, and lack of direction. The church has something to offer them. And, third, the continued life and ministry of the church depends upon enlisting and training new members. Everyone who comes into a congregation brings gifts, insights, and a history which strengthens and enriches the life of the community. These new persons, equipped and trained, serve God through the church's mission. Without them, present members eventually burn out. For these reasons the church requires a deliberate, intentional strategy of outreach.

This emphasis on outreach to individuals must be understood in the context of the church's total ministry. Because evangelism stands at the heart of the church, it pulsates through the worship of God, the nurture of the community, the serving hands of the faithful, and the intentional efforts of believers to reach out to others. These functions affirm God's unconditional love and passion that all persons have fellowship with the Deity. A balanced expression of evangelism evidences itself through worship, nurture, service, and outreach, and requires strong leadership and administration.

Several decades ago evangelistic emphasis focused on nurture. The images and strategies for evangelism were informed by a nurture model almost exclusively. In more recent years the focus has switched to service. Strategies for serving the world, being a redemptive presence, and working for justice have been the evangelistic emphases for mainline denominations.

Without minimizing the importance of these two thrusts, I believe the church must now concern itself with intentional outreach. While the ideas set forth here aim at growth and outreach, this focus does not diminish the importance of nurture nor of service. Rather, it presupposes the vitality of both, along with worship, as complements

of outreach. This summary underscores the necessity of a holistic approach to evangelism. The particular emphasis of these strategies will be to reach new persons and to incorporate them into the life of the congregation.

The function of outreach includes five irreducible tasks: attracting new person, identifying new persons, cultivating new persons, inviting new person, and assimilating them into the church's life.<sup>1</sup>

The tasks that Johnson speaks of are needed to prepare the church for church growth and are necessary if the job is to be successful, but to focus on church growth alone proposes a different kind of problem. Church growth is not to be scorned. Jesus' command to preach, teach, and baptize is a mandate to reach people for his church. He came for humanity, and there is undeniable failure when we do not let the Holy Spirit use us so that persons find their way to Christ and the church. Christ spoke of building his church (Matt. 16:18). Proper church growth is building Christ's church. But God did not so love the church that God gave his Son. God loved the world and brought the church into being as a means to serve God's people. One's goals determine one's techniques and strategies.<sup>2</sup> If the focus is not in its proper place then the results will be harmful to complete church and community. This is why we wanted to prepare the congregation to serve holistically and include the community and the growth of the church collectively. Complete focus on one could be detrimental to the other.

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Johnson, *An Evangelism Primer; Practical Principles for Congregations* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>Clinton M. Marsh, *Evangelism Is...* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1997).

Evangelism, mission, and discipleship are mandates that are necessary for the transformation needed in churches today to continue the position of Jesus Christ; to take care of the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor, and the needy through holistic healing.

Maintaining churches is not particularly problematic in itself, churches within mainstream Protestant denominations must begin re-envisioning and reconfiguring themselves by developing more relevant and viable ministries that speak to the whole person by addressing their emotional, spiritual, social, environmental, vocational, educational, political, economic, cultural, familial, and institutional needs. The gospel calls us to grow. We grow by offering people something of value and by cultivating spiritual and practical resources that will enable them to become change agents in their homes, families, and communities. By developing a new approach, we can pilot programs that will revitalize not only individual churches, but the denominations we serve as well.

Empowerment ministries quite simply call the people of God back to spiritual and ecclesiastical basics by developing ministries that optimize human potential through training, nurturing, healing, and education for human wholeness. It is ministry for the poor, oppressed, misused, abused, the haves and have not's, the influential and affluent, as well as the talented and gifted of American society. It is ministry that addresses the whole person and essentially reestablishes the church as a pivotal force for change and renewal in the world. It is ministry that captures the best of the evangelical and intellectual traditions of the Christian church for the transformation and empowerment of the larger culture and society. Churches can ill afford to have for-members-only, country-club

approaches to ministry or simply cultivate narcissistic, navel-gazing theologies that are always inward looking and never outward reaching.<sup>3</sup>

The researcher began this project to try to find a way to prepare the people of God to better serve those people of God that are not unchurched but maybe unreached by the church. Preparing to go forth and do the work of Jesus Christ has shown the author, researcher, pastor, that doing and saying I'll do does not mean the same thing. There are persons that claim to be Christians in name only. Knowing Jesus Christ and doing Jesus Christ takes having faith, being saved, and being delivered.

Until the man at the pool of Bethesda was called by Jesus, he had become complacent being in a place with persons like him, and he did not see the need to change because it had become so easy to just be. He had lost his hope. A loss of hope will dismantle your dreams. A loss of hope will diminish your expectation, and a loss of hope will disintegrate your dedication.<sup>4</sup>

The researcher's dreams, dedication, expectation, and hope have not been lost, because the process of completing this project, which will never end, has been a lesson learned about self and the healing that takes place when we let go and let God. To God Be The Glory!

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<sup>3</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *The Empowerment Church; Speaking a New Language for Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>Frederick G. Sampson II, *The Death of Hope; A Sermon*, May 1982.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **SERMONS**

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY  
Acts 2:42-47

Introduction

The huge redwood trees in California are amazing. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high and more than 2,500 years old. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. But that is not the case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other; interlocked. Thus, when the storms come and the winds blow the redwoods still stand.

With an interlocking root system they support and sustain each other. They need one another to survive. So do we!

Hence, God has given us His Church which is the body of Christ on earth. When one is baptized into Christ, one is baptized into the body of Christ. Through Christ we are bound together in a community of faith. Belonging to Christ we belong to each other. Fellowship with Christ means fellowship with each other. Through Christ God has made us a family, a community of faith. This is our God-given support system. As such, it is intended to meet some crucial needs in our lives.

Text

Our text for this morning tells us that the very first community of believers gathered together on a regular basis for worship, prayer, study and fellowship. Acts 2:44 says, "...ALL THAT BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER..."

It wasn't easy to follow Christ in the first century. Times were tough and persecution rampant. The early believers were bound together into a fellowship, a community. They needed each other; there is strength in numbers.- It also isn't easy for us to follow Christ and truly live for Him. Discouragement. Temptation. Sin. Apathy. Failure. Materialism. Unbelieving family and friends. Doubts. Rejection. Unanswered questions. We face so many obstacles in our desire to live for the Lord. God, however has not left us on our own to run the race and fight the battle. He has given us each other.

Our text reveals to us the proper focus of a community of believers. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The teaching to which they devoted themselves was the message about Jesus proclaimed by the Apostles. Jesus, the divine Son of God and Savior, was crucified and buried but He rose from the dead. The apostles' teaching included the words, actions, and teachings of the Lord. The breaking of bread is a reference to the Lord's Supper that they observed. It also referred to other times when they gathered around a common meal. Teaching, fellowship, praying and the Lord's Table were the focal points of the first Christian community.

### Community

In his book The Connecting Church, Author Randy Frazee writes, "The experience of authentic community is one of the purposes God intends to be fulfilled by the church. The writings of Scripture lead one to conclude that God intends the church, not to be one more bolt on the wheel of activity in our lives, but the very hub at the center of one's life....."(36/995).

The church or a local community of believers is essential to our spiritual well-being. In the New Testament there are no “Lone Ranger” Christians. Believers needed each other and God expected them to be there for each other. Likewise, we need each other and God expects us to be there for each other. God has ordained that we play a vital part in each other’s faith. For that reason we are commanded in Hebrews 10:25 not to, “...Give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another....” God has a purpose for putting us together.

And as Henri Nouwen points out, “We are unified by our common weaknesses, our common failures, our common disappointments and our common inconsistencies.” Luke informs us that “All the believers were one in heart and mind.”

They were united in Christ into a community of faith. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit they possessed the “Mind Of Christ.” They made every effort to be led by God’s Spirit and to think and act like Christ. Consequently, God used this community of faith to do some powerful things in the lives of countless believers, living in a pagan, godless world. God’s plan hasn’t changed. He still desires to use His Church to do some powerful things in our lives. The community of faith is absolutely crucial to our spiritual well-being. Through it God desires that we find strength for the journey, places to minister and a never ending source of guidance.

### Strength

As we face the inevitable trials, troubles and tragedies of life on this sin-marred earth, God intends that we be supported, strengthened, encouraged and empowered through the community of believers. As we face the storms and temptations of life we should receive strength from each other. Such is God’s plan.

In the course of his life, the Psalmist David knew his share of difficult, painful times that tested his faith and sometimes caused it to waver. In Psalm 61:2 he cried out to God for help saying, “....I call to you....as my heart grows faint....”

Overwhelmed by the trials, heartaches and burdens of life he called out to God for help and strength. Then in verse 5 he rejoiced because God had answered his plea. “You have given to me,” he said, “the heritage of those who fear your name...” God had strengthened his faith and empowered him but it was through fellow believers. The fact of the matter is that God works in our lives through other believers.

During the times when we are overwhelmed by trials, heartaches and the burdens of life we, too, need to be strengthened and encouraged by fellow believers. When we wonder if God really does love us and care for us we need God’s people. God, in His providence, has chosen to come to us through His people. Through other Christians we can sense and know God’s love and care. When we are loved and cared for by another believer, especially during painful times, we gain a new sense of God’s love at work through them for us.

Author Gary Burge says “When God’s love feels distant or non-existent, the body of Christ’s love is real and tangible....” (199/998) That is why we cannot afford to stand alone; to go it on our own. We need each other; we need the community of faith. In Leadership magazine, Carl Conner writes about the dangers of standing alone. A few winters ago, heavy snows hit North Carolina. Following a wet, six-inch snowfall, it was interesting to see the effect along I-40. Next to the highway stood several large groves of tall, young pine trees. The branches were bowed down with the heavy snow - so low that branches from one tree were often leaning against the trunk or branches of another.

Where trees stood alone, however, the effect of the heavy snow was different. The branches had become heavier and heavier. Since there were no other trees to lean against, the branches snapped. They lay on the ground, dark and alone in the cold snow. When the storms of life hit, we need to be standing close to other Christians. We need each other; we can't stand alone.(Vol. 16 #4)

The closer we stand in community, the more we will be able to hold up. Throughout our lives and especially during tough times, God desires to strengthen and empower us through the community of believers. He expects us to support each other during the storms of life. That is why we need to be an active part of a community of faith. We need others and they need us.

#### Ministry

The community of faith is crucial to our spiritual well-being because it is the place where we find special opportunities to minister. “Those in the community of faith do not merely absorb Christ’s love individually; their changed lives also reflect his love corporately.” Our union with Christ creates community responsibilities.” (131/1008/Chapell). We are called to minister and serve. We all have a God-given responsibility to reach out and minister to each other. Love acts; it serves God and others. Verse 44 says, “All the believers were together and had everything in common.”

Their ministry to each other included sharing of material goods to meet temporal needs. The early church shared much more extensively as a result of economic and social sanctions that were imposed upon the early believers. It was Christian sharing at its best. This is still God’s plan for meeting the needs of His hurting children. If we are not

ministering to one another through a community of faith then many needs go unmet and many reach the erroneous conclusion that God doesn't care about them.

### Guidance

The community of faith is crucial to our well-being because it is the source of much needed guidance, direction and even correction. As someone has aptly said, "we need the community of believers because none of us is as smart as all of us!" In Psalm 73:24 the Psalmist says "You shall guide me with your counsel..."

God yearns to guide us safely through our earthly pilgrimage, sparing us many wrong turns and harmful paths.

Ephesians 3:10 declares that "God's intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of god should be made known."

God wants to guide us but he has chosen to do it through His people in the community of faith. He gives us wisdom for the journey as we study His Word and pray together. Looking to the Lord's people we are much more apt to be guided down those paths that enrich our lives rather than wreck them. As we share our lives together God counsels us with advice that improves our relationships with Him, spouses, children and those around us. He guides us regarding proper priorities, values, morals and ethics. Through our interactions with each other and His Word He helps us make right choices and good decisions.

The guidance we receive through the community of faith is absolutely essential to our well-being, especially in these times when right is wrong and wrong is right. Through His people, God guides us away from sinful paths. So many ways of the world look so enticing and they are so acceptable. They promise to bring us great pleasure. They are

presented as harmless. We are told they will bring us happiness and fulfillment. But they don't. They bring us only heartache and regret.

Hebrews 3:13 says, "Exhort one another....that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Without a doubt, sin deceives. It promises much but delivers little. Were it not for the community of faith we might more easily and readily succumb to temptation and sin.

But through the community of faith we are guided into paths of righteousness and we are able to resist the sinful and deadly ways of the world. It is a fact: we all need the community of faith more than we often realize.

### Difficulties

Being in the community of faith is, however, not without its difficulties and frustrations. It can't be otherwise since it is made up of sinners. The mark of community - true biblical community - is not the absence of conflict and difficulties but the presence of a reconciling spirit. In our humanness we all do things to rub others the wrong way and to offend. We all, at times, will be hurt and we will hurt others. Our old sinful nature often causes problems.

Nevertheless, we must not back away from the fellowship of faith. We must make an unwavering commitment to a community of believers where we can be strengthened, find places of ministry and receive much needed guidance.

Our plight is not unlike that of a group of porcupines that the famous philosopher Schopenhauer once used to illustrate a point. A group of porcupines were marooned one bitter cold night in the middle of a large frozen field. There was no way to escape the biting wind. They could not borrow into the frozen ground. As they huddled together to

keep warm, their sharp quills began to pinch and hurt. The closer they moved together, the more the pain increased. Some of the animals could not bear the pain and drew apart to sleep alone. In the morning they had frozen to death.

In our humanness there are times when we hurt each other and the tendency is to pull away and go it alone. We must resist that tendency.

### Conclusion

We were created for community. The journey of life and faith is often trying, difficult and painful. Discouragement; Relentless temptation; Debilitating sins; Doubts. Ridicule; Burdensome weaknesses; Heavy burdens; Unanswered questions; Rejection. Little wonder God has given us the family of God and the fellowship of believers. It is an absolutely essential source of strength and guidance.

Ephesians 2:19 reminds us that as a result of our relationship with Christ, "... You are no longer foreigners and aliens (separated from god), but fellow citizens with god's people and members of god's household."

In Christ we are a community of faith, a special place where we can minister and be ministered to. We need each other. Therefore, the community of faith needs to be a priority in our lives.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN OUR LIFE  
Luke 5:1-11  
John Tung, 10-15-00

Introduction

Tiger Woods had one of the most incredible first years of any professional golfer in 1997. He won the prestigious Masters Tournament by an unheard of 12 strokes. He went on to win 4 of the 15 tournaments, earning \$1.8 million in prize money and \$60 million in endorsements from Nike and other companies.

But he did not stop there. Instead, right after the Masters, he called his coach and told him that he wanted to change his swing. He said his swing was not good. He wanted to make improvements. He was willing to risk his swing that had won him so many tournaments in order to further improve his skills, especially controlling his shots.

His coach believed that he could do it. But that it won't be easy, and it would take time. So he and his coach worked on hitting hundreds of practice balls, studying videotapes of his swings, pumping irons, especially for his forearms.

While he was reconstructing his swing, he won only 1 tournament in the next 19 months. But he persisted. And one day, it came. He felt that his swing was now just right and that he could control his shots much better than before.

In the next 14 tournaments, he won 10 of them, including 6 in a row, 3 of the four major championships, winning \$6 million dollars, and he just signed a \$100 million endorsement contract (TIME, July. 2000).

And yet many people did not know that he completely revamped his swings and golf game after his first year. Why did he make a change? Why did he change a good thing? The reason is because he wanted to be better and he knew he could be better.

Likewise, Jesus is not afraid of changing some things, even good things, because there is some other thing he wanted to accomplish. With Jesus however, he is not interested in winning human trophies and endorsements, and it is not that he needs to improve himself, but he is interested in winning people and winning them over to himself.

One such incident in which Jesus changed from doing one thing to another occurred in Luke 5. Let's read Lk. 5:1-11. [Read.]

#### Jesus Encountered Peter

Look at what Jesus was already doing here. He was teaching a crowd of peoples the word of God. They were listening to him. He had a captive audience, what more could he ask for? Wasn't this what he was sent to earth to do, to teach people about God and the way of salvation. But then he saw something else that attracted his attention.

He saw two boats by the water's edge. Two old boats used for fishing. There were two boats because fishermen often worked together in a coop arrangement to catch more fish (Bible Background Comm., 201). Jesus saw the fishermen washing their nets that they used to catch their fish. And Jesus changed what he was doing.

He stopped. He went over to the boats and asked one of the fishermen to take him out on the boat a little ways from the shore.

And the fisherman, named Simon, did just that. Jesus sat down in the boat and continued to teach the people from there.

Now Jesus was in a different location. He could still address the people, maybe more effectively since they could all see him now further away from them and his voice may be able to project to more them since he was facing all of them and the shore functioned better acoustically like an amphitheater (BBC, 201).

But I believe there was clearly another reason why Jesus wanted to speak from the boat. He wanted later on to talk to the owner of the boat, Simon. And this observation leads us to the first point we want to make about Jesus: He is not only interested in crowds, he is also interested in you individually.

#### Jesus Is Never Too Busy to Meet with Just You

Jesus could relate to the crowds as a classroom teacher, but he also wanted to relate to a person named Simon as an individual tutor.

In our kids' school, teachers are willing to meet with kids after school in order to help them with particular questions or difficulties they have about math, or English, or other subjects. These teachers are copying what Jesus is doing here, not only interested in a large class of students, but also individual students.

And this is true for how Jesus wants to relate to you too. Jesus is not only interested in us as a congregation gathered to worship him, which he delights in, but he is also personally interested in meeting with each of us one on one.

He may do that through something that the minister says that relates directly to you. God may do that through someone else that will speak to you. God may have done that this week in some time alone with him, for prayer and for silent meditation or for reading the word of God.

However God may reach you, know that God wants to reach you personally, like he did with Simon. What an astounding thought, Jesus was willing to leave the crowds in order to focus on just one person.

But why does Jesus approach just one person? Why would Jesus change his focus from one group to a single person? In other words, why would Jesus change from doing a perfectly good thing?

#### When Jesus Meets Us, It Is to Take Us from Shallow Faith to Deeper Faith

This leads us to the second reason why Jesus meets with us. The reason we learn from this passage, as is true to all such times when Jesus focuses on us individually, is because Jesus wants to take us from shallower faith to deeper faith.

This is what happened to Simon. He had been washing the nets while keeping one ear listening to Jesus. He had other responsibilities and duties to do. He had to fish to make a living. His family relied on him to bring in a good catch to eat and to sell. Simon was working hard at his job, like many of you are, in making a living for your family. So he thought he couldn't give up what he was doing and just spend the whole day with Jesus.

But Jesus was going to do something special in his life. Notice that when Jesus asked Simon to sit in his boat, he asked Simon to put out a little from the shore (vs. 3). Then after he had finished teaching the people, he told Simon to put out into the deep water to go for a catch of fish.

This movement from shallow water into deeper water I take as an analogy of what Jesus was going to do in Simon's faith life. Jesus was going to take Simon from his superficial, half-hearted and casual attention to him and turn that into a deeper, more personal and real commitment to Jesus.

Simon protested mildly, saying, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.... But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (vs. 5). In other

words, "I've already been there and nothing happened. But, oh well, since it is you, I will give it one more try." And how does Jesus take us from where we are to where he wants us to be?

By pushing us, that's how. Jesus pushes us, ever gently, sometimes with words, sometimes with actions, away from one level of stability, as symbolized by the shallow water near the shore, to a place where we are more dependent on God, as symbolized by the deeper water.

And we might also mildly argue with him, saying, "Lord, I've already been there and done that." I've already tried reading the Bible, I've already prayed, and it hasn't worked. I've already But hopefully we won't stop there, but will continue to say, "But if this is what you want me to do, to go once again from where I am now, then so be it." What happens in the deeper water? It is more scary. It is more unstable, at least more unfamiliar. But it is also where there are more fish. Fishermen never catch many fish from the shore; they have to go out into the deep water to catch larger fish and more fish.

Likewise, Jesus wants to take you from your comfortable shoreline to a deeper place where you will find more food for your soul and more dependence on him. This can come, for example, in the form of an illness, or other crisis, either to you or to someone you know, and all of a sudden, you are drifting away from predictability and one kind of stability to a place that is more mysterious and where you can't see the bottom. But God is taking you there. He is not abandoning you in that illness or crisis. He is actually using that situation like a boat to take you further out into a relationship with Him.

And the comforting thing for us to know is that even though we don't know exactly where the boat is going, we know that Jesus is sitting in the boat with us. To

know that the captain of the boat is with us is very comforting when we don't know where we are going. But the captain does. And the journey to the deeper water is always to help us to know God better.

#### Jesus Turns What We Are Concerned About Into What He Is Concerned About

This leads me to see the third point of this incident. We are always concerned about physical things; but Jesus is always concerned about spiritual things. Let me give you an example, at this time during the baseball playoffs, I am concerned about my baseball team, the Yankees, but Jesus is concerned about his team, the church. We are concerned about food to eat; Jesus is concerned about food for the hungry soul. We are concerned about bills to pay; Jesus is concerned about the eternal bill that we have to pay because of sin. We are concerned about clothes to wear; Jesus is concerned about the clothing of righteousness to cover our spiritual nakedness.

We, as Christians, are concerned about our life; Jesus is concerned about the life of those who don't yet know him. We are concerned about our retirement accounts; Jesus is concerned about people who will retire without knowing him. We are concerned about our kids' college bills; Jesus is concerned about our college kids' spiritual life. We are concerned about fish; Jesus is concerned about men. We are concerned about things; Jesus is concerned about people.

And whenever Jesus has an encounter with us, he wants us to be more concerned about spiritual things than physical things. And the way that Jesus often reaches us in our blindness and busyness in life is to take the physical things that we are so concerned about and turn it in a way that it becomes a lesson about spiritual things. And then we realize that Jesus is meeting us right in the middle of our life.

Jesus takes our health and turns it a bit so that there is some question about our health and all of a sudden, we have to look at life not just materially, but also spiritually. Jesus takes our stable jobs and turns it a bit so that there is some question about our work and all of a sudden, we realize that we need to redefine what we mean by success. Jesus takes our stable marriages and relationships and turns it a bit, and all of a sudden, we realize that relationships take work and communication and spiritual connection. Jesus takes our stable family life and turns it a bit and all of a sudden, we realize that we are selfish and we need to become more humble and listen more carefully.

In all of these events, Jesus is taking us from the shallow water into deeper water, and it is the deeper water that we begin to trust God more. So, thank God for the deep waters. English has a saying, "I'm in deep water," which has a negative connotation, meaning, "I'm in big trouble." Well, we may be in bigger trouble, but with God leading us to that deeper water, it is an occasion to regain our focus and realize what is most important. I think this is also true for our building project. We thought it would be easy to do, that was 8 years ago. After all, we had the experience of having previous building projects completed comparatively easily.

But then this project hasn't worked out that way at all. It has taken us 8 years now and we are still waiting for the building. In a time like that, it is easy to worry, doubt and be concerned. But God is leading us, like he led Simon, on a particular faith lesson, that is designed uniquely for us. He is taking us into deeper water, where more faith is required, where we cannot rely on previous experiences, where more is at stake, where more is unknown. But he is with us. He has not abandoned us. And there in the deeper water, where we are right now, God is telling us to let down the nets for a bigger catch.

That bigger catch will likely mean more people when the building is built. But the bigger catch is also designed for us individually. Jesus wants us to have a larger faith, a broader vision, and a deeper commitment. Without that, the building is useless.

Jesus, as he always does, takes the physical things, which are our first interest, and turns it into a matter of spiritual interest. And when we have learned that lesson, then God has accomplished his purpose in us and will be ready to use us spiritually. God took fishermen and made them into fishers of men, like he did with Peter and his friends. Likewise, whatever careers we do, God will also teach us faith lessons. That is the movement from shallower water into deeper water. I am not saying that they all gave up their jobs and became full-time Christian workers. But at least there should be the transformation into a deeper spiritual understanding of life.

In this way, God will take doctors and make them also healers of souls, like he did with Luke. He will take lawyers and make them judges of truth, like he did with the Apostle Paul. He will take shepherds and make them shepherds of people, like he did with David. He will take builders and make them builders of nations, like he did with Solomon. He will take artists and make them communicators of beauty, like he did with Bezalel. He will take students and make them students of his word, like he did with Daniel. He will take administrators and make them administrators of his grace, like Moses or Joseph in the OT. He will take farmers and make them sowers of truth, like he did with Amos. What is the conclusion? Don't be afraid when God is taking you from one place to another. He has a purpose. And we don't need to be afraid. Amen.

## God Is Good

2 Peter 1:4-1:4

Did you Know --- The Good News of the Word of God Won't work for Everybody? That may be a startling statement for many of you to hear today....But it is true.....Now some of you are thinking ...."I knew it all along....I knew it wasn't just me" But hold on here just a minute... Don't be satisfied with that .....The Answer is Easier than you might think....

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them.... That means: It didn't do them Any Good whatsoever.... Why Not?.....Was there something Wrong with it?.....Was there something missing in it? .....NO, it's what they Didn't Do with what they heard that messed them up.

Verse 2 goes on to say.....but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Now, it is meant for everyone.....and yet it Does not work for everyone.... 2 Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter said "Ye MIGHT BE" partakers... God wants us to share in the Divine Nature ....He wants us to Escape corruption. Well, where or with whom does the CONDITION lie? ----with YOU, he said Ye might be...We need to Understand that the POTENTIAL is THERE. The Word of God is FULL of Potential for you and me.... There's no shortage on God's Part to make His Word come to pass in/for you God's

Word contains Magnificent promises and yet not everyone will enjoy the benefit of them.... But the Promises are for Whosoever will, let him come..... Psalms 145:9 The LORD is good to all: ....and his tender mercies are over all his works. Don't let satan convince you that God's Goodness isn't for you.....that you're not good enough, .....righteous enough.....He's good to ALL....

We need to Let the Spirit of God help us to Change our thinking about God.... Romans 1:16 Paul said "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. The Power of God Becomes Available to us As We Believe The Gospel .....The Gospel is the The Good News about God to us....God wants to Bless us ----but He needs our Cooperation....Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Did you Hear That? ----The Bible says that God is a REWARDER.....I know it doesn't say He is a rewarder of just anybody who does any old thing.....But Let's focus for a few minutes on the fact that God is a Rewarder....This may surprise a lot of folks to hear this, but God Get's Pleasure out of Blessing People. Jesus said in Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Psalms 35:27 ....., Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant. But, You will never enjoy the Benefits God intends for you to have---- until you believe the Good News about God.....

Now, there are Many folks that think that God is out to Take Everything Away from them....But He isn't.-----He wants to Give You Everything.....1 Timothy 6:17 says

He....."giveth us richly all things to enjoy." The Heart of God is Looking for Ways to Bless His People.....Listen to what He says in.....Deuteronomy 5:29 O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

The truth is.....God wants you to have a Great Life.....a Long Life.....Full of Blessings and Peace.....Comfort, Joy and Love. God wants us to Obey Him for OUR OWN BENEFIT ----not His...That's why Romans 2:4 Says.... despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? To go against God's Word ---His Will for us is Foolishness..... His Only Benefit to Blessing You and Making your life great is the same as Any other Father's would be.

A good father wants the best for his children....because of his love for them.... Sure, He puts Limits on them to protect them.... Sure, He Corrects them.....but that too is the product of love....None of you would just turn your kids loose, I hope, to do Whatever they want to do....whenever they want to do it...No, you set Limits on them for their own good.... Then you wonder why they resent you .....and feel bad at you ---but you do the same thing to God....You pout at Him and accuse Him of not caring about you....

We need to Understand -----God is a GIVER ----He is the REWARDER

He's not Holding out on us.....He's holding out FOR US.....Psalms 84:11..... no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. He's Storing it up for us.....waiting on the day He gets to bless us like He wants to .....David said in Psalms 31:19 Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!

He said "How great is the goodness of the Lord!" I believe David Knew something about the Goodness of the Lord.... David got to know God while keeping those sheep in Bethlehem... He fellowshiped with God and came to know His nature....He know Him as a Loving God.....a Good God, Kind, and Patient. David knew God would take care of him, provide for him and Protect him....Psalms 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

That sounds like someone who Knew the Goodness of God....David knew to Expect Good things from God. That's why David wasn't Afraid to fight Goliath....His Faith in God's Goodness kept him going forward toward the promise of God.....Psalms 27:13 (AMP) [What, what would have become of me] had I not believed that I would see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living!

That's why David challenges us in...Psalms 34:8 to "taste and see that the LORD is good...." David knew that if you will delight yourself in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart. Psalms 37:4 Notice, I didn't say "He'd give you the desires of His heart.....but Your Heart." But in order to Receive the Reward from the Lord -----You have to BELIEVE Him for it. Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please

him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.Your Circumstance don't move God ----Your Faith Moves Him.....Jesus said "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believes"

Understanding God's Goodness is the foundation of Faith..... The more we know God's goodness, the more we trust Him.... The more we trust Him.....the easier it is for us to put our lives into His hands. Only by placing our complete trust in Him can He save us, bless us, and work through us,...so that His wonderful will can be done on earth as it is in heaven.....

Until you settle the fact that God is good....and you can trust Him with your life, .your Faith is never going to be great because you will always draw back in fear.... God is a GOOD GOD -----we just need to get to Know Him ----better....

Job 22:21 Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.The Amplified translation says "Great Good." God is the source of Everything that is good.....James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Many folks Know About Jesus, but they have never come to Know Him Personally ----for themselves....You may have heard about Him.....You may even believe what you've heard.....But Believing Alone Is Not Enough....We have to Do Something About what we believe before it will Produce Results in our lives. I can only think of one reason why someone would be hesitant to make Jesus their Lord ---why they would be afraid to give their life to Him. They Don't Know How Good He Is.....  
They are afraid that if they give themselves to Him, He might deprive them of the good

things they want and need. Fear makes them draw back because they are not really sure God has their best interests at heart. They do not understand the simple fact that God is a Good God.

That Fear will Keep you in Bondage..... Fear is the Link to Bondage. It's fear that gives satan power in people's lives....It's fear that stops people from accepting God's Word and Walking away from the enemy...Fear stops us from saying things we Ought to Say .....and has us saying things we Shouldn't say.... 1 John 4:18 says "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment....." As we get to Know God and His Goodness, His Love, and Mercy and Grace....We can walk free from FEAR....and We can Walk In the Blessing that God has been waiting to get into our lives. Fear brings Torment -----but the Cure for Fear is found in Growing in God's Love. In Finding out about the Goodness of God ----FIRSTHAND.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. I am convinced.....that God wants to Pour His blessings upon us....He wants us so blessed that everywhere we look, we see the goodness of God.

## Here Am I; Send Me! Isaiah 6:1-13

### Introduction

"No controversy swirls around the date for Isaiah's encounter with God in the temple. It happened in 740 B.C., the year in which King Uzziah died. Unresolved controversy, however, does come from the question, "How does Isaiah's experience in the temple relate to the first five chapters in the book?" Is chapter six misplaced? Did Isaiah prophesy before he was called? Is his experience in the temple a confirmation of his calling? Or did he have a special reason for placing chapter six after the opening chapters?

The account of Isaiah's calling is not misplaced. To force a chronological sequence upon Isaiah is to miss the purpose of the prophet's writing. Our perspective is that he summarized his prophecies and stated his themes in the first five chapters to show the priority of the message over the messenger. If so, Isaiah continues to be consistent with his introduction and his writing throughout the book in which the answer to the question what takes precedence over the question who. As we have already noted, Isaiah is not a prophet on an ego trip. He mentions his own name only when it is relevant to a historical happening and omits it entirely when the vision takes him into a future of which he will not be part. Yet, we also remember that Isaiah alone among the prophets claimed to receive his prophetic authority directly from God. Logically, then, his decision to include a personal testimonial of his encounter with God when he received his vision serves as the sign and seal for his prophetic authority." (The Preacher's Commentary)

## Transition

This morning we will examine the calling of the “Prince of Prophets,” Isaiah. We will look at God’s dealings with Isaiah and the issues which were raised in God’s conversation with Isaiah. Isaiah time and again is diligent in his keeping the emphasis off of himself and squarely upon God.

There are two great and prevailing themes present in all of the oracles of Isaiah. First, we learn a great truth for all of us to apply, especially teachers of God’s Word, that in our lives we should mimic the prophet in taking the emphasis off of self and allowing God to reign supreme in our lives; in all that we are and do.

Second, in his constant reference to God, the prophet offers great insight in the character and nature of the sovereign God of the universe. We will examine both.

## Exposition

### Confronted by God (Isaiah 6:1-4):

In the opening section of today’s text we see that when God called Isaiah He confronted him in a powerful way. There are times in our lives when God breaks onto the scene and confronts us with His presence, with His will for our lives, and with His word. He may not do it by whisking us away into the very throne room of Heaven but He will do it nevertheless.

The question for us to answer is whether we will be willing to listen to His voice when it comes? I have occasionally shared my journey of calling to the ministry. Mine was a journey more than a onetime event, though to be sure there were large markers

along the path. When I was 16, I had a profound experience as I pray at my grandmother's house for a very long time.

I was not swept up into the throne room of Heaven, there was no lightening or thunder, no burning bush; just the roaring silence of God's voice speaking directly to my heart. From that time until finally coming to terms with the reality that God was going to have His way in my life, there were times when I pursued God and times when He pursued me.

I was terrified of the reality that God desired to use me for the ministry. I felt inadequate, unskilled, ungifted, I was a messed up kid from a messed up family who grew up in a messed up city in Northern California. How on earth could God use me? My fear was fueled by an inadequate view of God's provision.

I was right that I was not good enough and did not measure up. But my ability to measure up was not what was at stake. God had not asked if I had something to offer Him for service; He has called me for service and God always supplies. When God sends us He always sends us with the provision necessary for the journey ahead. I was answering the wrong question for the question was not "Am I good enough to be used of God." The question was is God big enough to make a way for His plans to come to fruition. The trouble with me was that I had an inadequate view of God. I wonder if I am not alone. Has God called you to do something and you feel like you don't measure up?

Each of us has a divine task for the Kingdom and God and while we cannot do what only God can do, God will not do what He has called us to do. We are His hands and His feet. Why o why are we so busy building our little kingdoms in the sand rather than allowing God to work through and in our lives? Why do we wonder why we do not

experience victory in our lives when we do not open ourselves up for God to be seated on the throne of our lives?

Are we waiting to be swept up into the throne room of Heaven like Isaiah? Let us learn today the lesson of the prophet Isaiah! Let us cast off inadequate, inappropriate, insufficient views of God. I am convinced that if in our minds eye we saw God as the Bible portrays Him to be, as He really is, all powerful, all capable, and sovereign, that we would fear far less of the kingdoms of this world and do much more to build the kingdom of God.

#### The Sovereignty of God (Isaiah 6:1-2):

When Isaiah sees the Lord He is seated on a throne, indicative of the sovereignty of God as He is seated high above the earth on a majestic throne. This speaks of God's sovereign rule over the affairs of the Universe, the Galaxy, the World, you and me. The train of His robe filling the temple is suggestive of the presence of the sovereignty of God filling all that He created.

God is high and lifted up; majestic and sovereign. He is also intimately concerned with that which He created and immediately available to His creation. The question is sometimes raised, "Is God immanent or transcendent?" That is, "Is God separate and over His creation or is He present in His creation?" The human mind has such trouble with seeming dichotomies.

We long desperately to categorize everything, even God. The reality is that He is both seated above and available within. He is at all times seated upon the throne of sovereign rule and at all times the train of His robes fill the temple; the earth.

In the first five chapters of the book of Isaiah which lead up today's passage of Scripture we see that the children of Israel had become too complacent to heed the warnings of God. (Isaiah 5:20-23) Just as in our day, the people had lost a sense of the absolute sovereign nature of God. As a result even their leaders had fallen into sin and as a result judgment.

When we lose sight of the sovereignty of God, when we remake Him into something other than the mighty God of creation and God of our lives we so easily commit the sin of the Children of Israel of idolatry and risk cutting ourselves off from the very source of power that we need for our lives.

Why of why would we not want to worship of God of might and awe? Is a God of lesser deity worthy of praise and adoration? Is the material god of this generation worthy of praise? Look around as the god of this age crumbles on alters of gold which were built to his glory.

God is sovereign, all powerful, not a god I can put in a box or worship as I see fit according to my preferences. He created the world and all that is in it. He is of infinite worth and why o why would I want to worship a God who was anything less? Why would I long to spend eternity with a God who was not able to author and finish my salvation? Why o why would I long to see loved ones gone before me into glory if I did not serve a God capable of creating such a place?

We could talk at length with regard to the sovereignty of God and perhaps we should, but let us not neglect to emphasize the holiness of God.

### The Holiness of God (Isaiah 6:3)

Isaiah recounts the presence of the seraphim. These are angels whose name literally means “the burning ones” because light emanated from them because of their holiness and purity. And yet, they covered their face with their wings so that they might show honor to the source of holiness; God almighty. The text says that they covered their feet, which is likely a sign of humility.

We live in a generation, as did Isaiah that has forgotten the holiness of God. Why are men and woman separated from God eternally if they should die without having repented of their sin and accepted Christ atonement? For what reason are men denied accesses to Heaven to live in a state of eternal separation from God?

The biblical message is that God is perfectly holy and He cannot look upon that which is unclean. God is pure and cannot overlook the evil that we do to one another in this life! Sin is an affront to God’s holiness! How much different would our actions be if in the moment of decision we considered the holiness of God?

How much would our hearts be changed if we mediated on the reality of the holiness and purity and love of the one who created us to live in perfect communion with Him? How much more pure would our motives be if we lived out of a commitment not to bring offense to the holy God of creation?

Would that our hearts would break under the burden of guilt for the sin we have committed in this life that we might run for the shelter of the Cross! O for a generation of believers who would once again agonize under the conviction of sin and cry out in the presence of a holy God as did Isaiah, “Woe to me! I am ruined for I am a man of unclean

lips who lives among a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the holiness of the King and I am ruined!” (v5 paraphrased).

But alas, we are a generation who has been desensitized to the stench of our own sin and which has been blinded to the purity of God! Dear Saints of God, hear me this morning, mine is a heart which longs to see men and women of God return to a full and right understanding of the sovereignty and holiness of God that we might learn to relate rightly to Him according to the forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ!

Juxtaposed to the message being pumped out of big media churches, opposite the mainstream prosperity gospel message, we don't have to live lives which only mirror the culture. We don't serve a God who is primarily concerned with making us prosperous and successful. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to reconcile us back to God so that we might receive the fullness of peace, hope, joy, love, no matter what the prince of this world throws at us; not matter what life brings.

The best self-help seminar ever attended was right here in Isaiah chapter 6. We don't need the power of positive thinking. We need to cast ourselves on the mercy of almighty God that He might infuse us with His Spirit, His power, His worth, His love, and thus enable us for the very real trials of this life.

Forgive me today, as I cast aside the modern prosperity Gospel message in favor of something that I can build my life upon. I join with the Apostle Paul as I beg you therefore brethren by the mercies of God... let our minds be renewed by the power and the presence of the sovereign Lord of creation; the holy God of our salvation; unto a new and lasting eternal hope; the reality of reconciliation with God and with one another.

Convicted of Sin (Isaiah 6:5):

Standing there in the presence of God Isaiah was convicted of His sin. He felt the full weight of his anguish over his utter unworthiness to stand before a holy God. He felt utterly inadequate, spiritually poor, completely undone, and insufficient.

The great trouble was that just like me when I sensed the call to ministry and just like many of us when we hear the voice of God; Isaiah had an insufficient view of God. For though He is pure and holy, righteous and just, God is also full of grace and mercy, slow the anger the Bible says, and quick to forgive.

He created us to live in fellowship with Him and just as He took the hot coal to cleanse the lips of Isaiah, so too He has made a way for the purification of our souls and the forgiveness of our sins. That fire is consummated by faith in Jesus Christ according to the presence of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

The fire which purifies us is the same fire which ignites us. I invite you today to come by faith to the fount of forgiveness which flows in Christ blood. If you have been walking with Christ for many years or you have only recently known what it means to live in communion with Christ, know this; we are not called to drink once from the fountain of forgiveness.

We have been invited to live, to dwell beneath the crashing of its waters. You and I are standing waste deep in a pool of forgiveness, bathing in grace as the waters of God's love and forgiveness fall upon our heads, washing us continually of our sin and imperfection; reconciling us to the God who called us.

## Conclusion

Forgiveness is free. Reconciliation is the fruit of forgiveness. While that fruit is given freely its receipt comes at a great cost; the cost of our lives. (Matthew 10:34-39 NIV) Jesus says, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” We have been called to embrace the sovereignty of a holy God in our lives. As we let go of our inadequate views of God and overly inflated views of self, we will find the very thing which so often eludes us; the peace, the joy, the love, and the reconciliation for which we long. It is in letting go that we receive. It is in embracing the holiness of the King that we live. Amen.

## USING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Luke 19:11-27

Dr. Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ tells this story of a famous oil field called Yates Pool: During the depression this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Mr. Yates wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family (like many others) had to live on government subsidy.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he was no doubt greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills. Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. In fact, 30 years after the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed it still had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day.

And Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he'd been living on relief. A multimillionaire living in poverty. The problem? He didn't know the oil was there even though he owned it.

Many Christians live in spiritual poverty. They are entitled to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and his energizing power, but they are not aware of their birthright.

SOURCE: Untapped Spiritual Resources, by Greg Asimakopoulos, Naperville, Illinois.

Citation: Bill Bright, "How to Be Filled with the Spirit" (Campus Crusade publication)]

The parable we look at this morning is about wasted potential and neglected responsibility. In this parable the master leaves his servants with money to invest. When he returns some of the servants are proved to be faithful, others are proved to be lazy. Let me point you to several lessons from this text,

### GOD HAS GIVEN US GIFTS

But each man has his own gift from God;...1 Cor. 7:7

ABILITY: Old French-habilite "The quality of being able to do something, especially the physical, mental, financial, or legal power to accomplish something." "Ability denotes qualities that enable a person to achieve or accomplish something." - American Heritage Dictionary

In that story, each servant was given differing amounts, "in accordance with their ability." Everyone has given us gift to use for His glory. "Master, here's your 5,000 coins!" There are many gifts that God has given us. Our job is real simple. We are to find what gifts and abilities we have been given. We must find a way to use them to bring Him glory and honor.

Every one has given PROPER gifts. 1 Cor. 7:7 "Every man hath his PROPER gift from God." KJV. "Proper" means "fitted." When you buy shoes, the salesman tells you, "We've got a shoe to perfectly fit your size that will perfectly suit your style of life." There are so many Christians today who think God skipped over them when He was giving out gifts. They seem to think that the only gifts God gives are gifts of music, public speaking, or teaching. Those are just a small measure of what God gives to people. God gives many gifts: It may be our finances, a particular talent, insightful ideas, an ability to organize, a great vision (you see possibilities others never thought of), a caring

heart (you are tuned in to those around you), the ability to give wise counsel to those who need guidance, the ability to mediate between warring parties, or the ability to build or fix things.

### GOD HAS GIVEN US A RESPONSIBILITY

In this parable God has given us talents in order for us to become responsible children. And more talents comes more responsibilities. Of course we can do this in many ways,

- By our personal explanation of the gospel to our friends and relatives
- By giving Christian literature (tracts, books, sermons etc.) to others
- By investing in evangelistic efforts (radio, television, prison ministry)
- We can do it through newspaper ads, letters of the editor and articles
- We can do it through the Internet (web pages, discussion groups, e-mail)
- We can do this through our acts of kindness and mercy

God has entrusted us with the treasure of the gospel. We can bury that treasure or we can invest it at every opportunity. Illustration. A man distributed tracts for many years on a street corner. Finally, seeing no visible results, he gave up. When he returned to the same spot two years later, he saw another individual handing out Gospel leaflets as he had done. Striking up a conversation, he discovered that the man had become a Christian through a salvation tract given him on that corner about two years before. The convert added, "Many times I've come back here to find that earnest worker and thank him, but he never returned. I decided he must have died, and so I've taken his place!" The first man suddenly realized that his work had not been in vain. Much encouraged he went back to giving out tracts the very next day.

### God Has Given Us A Promise

The parables tells us a message: the person who serves faithfully will be rewarded. There two principles that are highlighted here. Those who are trustworthy in little things will be given more. When you use your gifts, you will grow more gifts. When you faithfully use your spiritual gifts, you will get more gifts you don't have; or you will grow in the effectiveness of your present gifts. You can get other gifts. "Desire earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31). Paul wrote to the Romans that he wanted to come see them and help them get some spiritual gifts they didn't have. "I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift" (Romans 1:11).

You can grow your present gifts. This means you can become more effective. Paul was not satisfied with Timothy's use of his gifts, "Stir up the gift of God which is in thee" (II Tim. 1:6). This is a picture of stirring up the coals of fire to make it hotter. You will never be used greatly by God until you are faithful in what he has given you to do now. (Verse 19)

Little things of life we show whether or not we can handle the big things. Little things of life often turn into the big things. Everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. "Now ask me why there are Christians who said they have no gifts—and I will tell why" "Yes, the king replied, 'but to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.'

### God Has Given Us A Warning

The warning is clear to those who do nothing with the talents that God has given. They will lose what they have been given. There is Christian that they know they are

gifted but they bury their gifts instead of practicing it. Like the servant in the story. There are Christians that they don't care about their gifts. Illustration. Dear Abby recorded a powerful story. A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was a custom in their affluent community for parents to give their graduating children a new car, and the boy and his dad had spent weeks visiting one dealership after another. The week before graduation they found the perfect car. They boy was certain it would be in the driveway on graduation night.

On the eve of his graduation, however, his father handed him a small package wrapped in colorful paper. The Father said the package contained the most valuable gift the Father could think of. It was a Bible! The boy was so angry he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again. Several years later the news of the father's death finally brought the son home again. Following the funeral, he sat alone one evening, going through his father's possessions that he was to inherit when he came across the Bible his dad had given him. Overwhelmed by grief, he brushed away the dust and cracked it open for the first time. When he did, a cashier's check dated the day of his high school graduation fell into his lap --in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together. The gift had been there all along . . . but he had turned away.

### Conclusion

The best investment we can make with our life is to use what God has given us to bring honor and glory to the Father. This approach will lead us away from many of the dangers of life; it will enable us to share in the blessings of God, and it will lead us to the indescribable joy of hearing the Father's "Well Done".

Brethren, the Lord expects us to become available in exercising our gifts. Remember that God does not ask your ability or your inability. He asks only your availability.  
God bless!

## You Can't Run Away from Problems

Ruth 1:1-1:5

It is an undeniable fact that many of the life's problems we grapple with in the present are the result of what has happened to us in the past, whether as a result of our own deliberate choices or because of circumstances which were quite beyond our control.

The person we are today is a product of all our yesterdays. We can blame our genetic inheritance or environment for our problems. It is often easier for us to shift the blame for our problems on to others, but to put it solely on this is to ignore our own actions or inactions.

More important than the circumstance of the past are the ways in which we have decided to react to them. Such behavior often crystallizes into patterns, which harden into settled convictions, which in turn condition and dictate our present feelings.

In Ruth chapter 1, we see a tragic situation where Naomi is left, widowed and childless, without sons or grandsons to continue the family line, which is a situation of great deprivation and despair. All this has happened in a foreign land, far away from the support of those who speak her language or worship her God.

Today, many people will identify only too readily with Naomi's experience. Some will have gone through similar traumatic times of bereavement. Others will have made life decisions they now feel very bitter about—the job move that led to being laid off, the marriage that broke up almost from the beginning, the disappointment of children who have overthrown their parents' faith and are sowing wild oats. "Where did I go wrong?" is very often followed by "why did God let this happen to me?" (Jackman, David ; Ogilvie, Lloyd J.: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 7 : Judges, Ruth. Nashville, Tennessee : Thomas Nelson Inc, 1991 (The Preacher's Commentary Series 7), S. 306).

In Ruth 1:1-5 we see the danger of trying to run away from our problems illustrated and it is a lesson that we must avoid as we deal with the problems and trials of life.

### 1) The time. Ruth 1:1a

Ruth 1:1a [1:1] In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. (ESV)

The author of Ruth is not identified by the text. Though there is no unanimity among ancient or modern scholars in dating the Book of Ruth, the first verse places the historical setting of the book during the period of the judges between the fourteenth and eleventh centuries B.C. (c. 1375–1050 B.C.). The genealogy in 4:18–22 suggests the latter part of that era. The book of Ruth is (most likely written) during the reign of David (1010–970 B.C.) (Believer's Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S.

Ru 1:1).

It must be remembered therefore, that even though the historical setting of the events described is that of the period of the judges (1:1), but this does not necessarily mean that the work was written at that time. In fact, it is much more probable that Ruth was composed in a later period, for two important reasons. First, the concluding genealogy (4:18–22) brings the narrative up to the time of David, who was obviously familiar to author and readers alike, and thus would require a date of composition in the early kingdom period at the very least. Second, the account contains some explanation of legal practices (4:1–12), required since they were already ancient. Thus it would seem that some time had elapsed between the events described and their appearance in written form. In English Bibles Ruth occurs between Judges and Samuel. This follows the order of the Septuagint and locates it correctly with the historical books. The ancient Jewish authorities attached great importance to the book by requiring it to be read at the Feast of Weeks, when the end of the grain harvest was celebrated. (Elwell, Walter A.: Evangelical Commentary on the Bible . electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1996, c1989, S. Ru 1:6).

Spiritually, during the period of the Judges:

Judges 17:6 [6]In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (ESV) (cf. Jdg. 18:11; 19:1; 21:25).

In those days there was no governor armed with imperative authority, who could help and discipline the whole people. Everyone did what they wanted, and became their own yardstick of morality.

- Part of the tribe of Dan forsook the land in a body, because they were no longer pleased with it, and had no mind to overcome the remaining enemies

God had commanded the Israelites under Joshua's leadership to purge the land of the Canaanites and their idols (Deut. 7:16; 12:2-3; 20:17). The failure of the Israelites to do so (Josh. 16:10; Jud. 1:27-33) left them open to the temptation to look to the idols rather than to God for agricultural blessing. Perhaps the cultic prostitution and sexual practices used in the worship of Baal also enticed the Hebrew people. Interestingly Gideon's father had built an altar to Baal, but Gideon had destroyed it (Jud. 6:25-34). The Ruth narrative shows the wisdom of trusting in God and His providence rather than in Canaanite gods (Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:418-419).

The Book of Judges is the story of Israel at one of its lowest points in history and is a record of division, cruelty, apostasy, civil war, and national disgrace. The period of the Judges was marked by weak faith and irresponsible conduct. Even Gideon, who exhibited great faith against overwhelming odds during the destruction of the invading Midianites, Amalekites, and eastern desert tribes (Jud. 7:12, 17-21), later failed to seek God's advice in the everyday affairs of his judgeship (Jud. 8:16-17, 21, 27). (Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An

Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:415).

- The book of Ruth is many ways is a picture of following God's will in the everyday.
- We have many choices to make in our lives. Certain choices have long term effect. Other choices, although minor at the time, build up to major events.
  - o Jumping off a cliff is a choice that will have immediate results. Deciding to smoke, is a choice that builds upon itself to a likewise catastrophic result.
  - o We are to look at the story of the book of Ruth as the impact of the choices we make in light of God's overall providential control of events.

## 2) The place. Ruth 1:1b

Ruth 1:1b [1:1]In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. (ESV)

A famine struck Canaan west of the Rift Valley. The weather was such that the rains did not drop on the lower elevations of Judah and Ephraim, but they did on the higher plateau of Moab farther to the east. As a result, Bethlehem was not able to feed its people  
 (Lawrenz, John C.: Judges, Ruth. Milwaukee, Wis. : Northwestern Pub. House, 1997  
 (The People's Bible), S. 220).

Although famines were common in the days of the Patriarchs some eight hundred years earlier (cf. Gen 12:10; 26:1; 43:1), this is the first recorded famine encountered by Israel since entering the land of Canaan (Smith, James E.: The Books of History. Joplin, Mo. : College Press, 1995, S. Ru 1:1-5).

Please turn to Deuteronomy 28

Famine had devastated southern Judah, compelling Elimelech and his family to cross the Jordan and live in the large grain-producing uplands (Heb. field) of Moab, visible to the east of the Dead Sea. It is ironic that Bethlehem ("house of bread") has an empty granary. The locating of the town "in Judah" is done to distinguish it from another, more northerly Bethlehem (see Josh. 19:15) (Elwell, Walter A.: Evangelical Commentary on the Bible . electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1996, c1989, S. Ru 1:6).

- In scripture, a famine was often an evidence of God's discipline because His people had sinned against Him (Lev. 26:18–20; Deut. 28:15, 23–24).

Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24 [15]"But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. [23]And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. [24]The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed. (ESV)

During the time of the Judges, Israel repeatedly turned from God and worshiped the idols of the heathen nations around them; and God had to discipline them (Jdg. 2:10–19). Many years later in Elijah's day God sent another famine as judgment on Israel for

worshiping Baal (1 Kings 16:30-17:1; 18:21, 37; 19:10).

- Don't ever think that just because you may control your own actions that you will be immune from Judgment. The relatively innocent will suffer for the actions of the sinful. Children suffer for the sinfulness of their parents and even the godly of society will suffer when evil is unchecked.

In the life of a Christian, spiritual famine comes not by accident. When we are obedient to God, God rains His blessings upon us and we have spiritual abundance. When we are disobedient, God withholds His blessings and we experience spiritual famine. (That is the message the God portrays in John 15:1–11 about abiding in Him and bearing spiritual fruit.) (Gingrich, Roy E.: The Books of Judges & Ruth. Memphis, TN. : Riverside Printing, 2006, S. 33)

### 3) The decision. Ruth 1:1c

Ruth 1:1c [1:1]In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. (ESV)

When trouble comes to our lives, we can do one of three things: a) endure it, b) try to escape it, or c) enlist it. If we only endure our trials, then trials become our master, and we have a tendency to become hard and bitter. If we try to escape our trials, then we will probably miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. But if we learn to enlist our trials, they will become our servants instead of our masters and we will learn from them; and God will work all things together for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

When a man (Elimelech) of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he made the wrong decision when he decided to leave home. What made this decision so wrong?

- a) He walked by sight and not by faith.

The text gives no evidence that God directed Elimelech to leave Bethlehem

Abraham made the same mistake when he encountered a famine in the land of promise (Gen. 12:10ff). Instead of waiting for God to tell him what to do next, he fled to Egypt and got into trouble.

In times of trouble:

Isaiah 40:30-31 [30]Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31]but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

- You can't run away from your problems. They follow you.

How do you walk by faith? By trusting in the promises of God and obeying the Word of God, in spite of what you see, how you feel, or what may happen. It means committing yourself to the Lord and relying wholly on Him to meet the need. When we live by faith,

it glorifies God, witnesses to a lost world, and builds Christian character into our lives. God has ordained that “the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; 2 Cor. 5:7); and when we refuse to trust Him, we are calling God a liar and dishonoring Him.

Please turn to James 3

There is a wisdom of this world that leads to folly and sorrow, and there is a wisdom from God that seems folly to the world but that leads to blessing

James 3:13-18 [13]Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14]But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15]This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16]For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17]But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. [18]And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (ESV) (1 Cor. 3:18–20).

Poem: Afraid?

Afraid?

Of what?

To feel the spirit's glad release,

To pass from pain to perfect peace,

The strife and strain of life to cease.

Afraid of that?

Afraid?

Of what?

Afraid to see the Savior's face,

To hear his welcome and to trace

The glory gleaned from wounds of grace

Afraid of that?

Afraid?

Of what?

A flash, a crash

A pierced heart

Darkness!

Light!

Oh, heaven's art!

A wound of His,

A counterpart

Afraid of that?

Afraid?

Of what?

To do by death what life could not  
 Baptize with blood a stony plot  
 Till souls shall blossom from this spot  
 Afraid of that?(From John & Betty's Stamm's belongings after their death in China)  
 Elimelech a) Walked by sight and not by faith, but also:  
 b) He majored on the physical and not the spiritual.  
 It is a righteous for a husband and father to provide for his wife and family, but he must not attempt to do it at the expense of honoring God in the process.

Please turn to Matthew 4

When Satan met Jesus in the wilderness, his first temptation was to suggest that Christ satisfy His hunger rather than please His Father

Matthew 4:1-4 [4:1]Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2]And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. [3]And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." [4]But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (cf. John 4:34).

- One of the devil's pet lies is: "You do have to live!" But it is in God that "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28, NIV); and God is able to take care of us.

David's witness is worth considering:

Psalm 37:25 [25]I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

- One of the very purposes that God has commanded a community of believers to congregate together is to ensure this. God uses all kinds of means to provide for His saints.

#### Illustration: 4142 Under Or Above Circumstances

There is a story of a lady who was severely depressed by a series of disheartening events. When asked how she was weathering the storm of adversity, she answered, "Quite well, under the circumstances." "Sister," he replied kindly yet firmly, "you'll never make it that way. Get ABOVE the circumstances—that's where Jesus waits to help and strengthen you." She took his wise admonition as a word from heaven, and laying aside her sadness and self-pity, she began to praise the Lord. New confidence in God's love and kindness was generated in her soul, and she soon gained the victory of faith. (Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979)

Elimelech a) Walked by sight and not by faith, b) He majored on the physical and not the spiritual. and third:

c) He honored the enemy and not the Lord.

By going fifty miles to the neighboring land of Moab, Elimelech and his family abandoned God's land, God's people, and essentially, God Himself for the land and people of the enemy.

Moabites were cousins to the Hebrews through Lot, Abraham's nephew (Lawrenz, John C.: Judges, Ruth. Milwaukee, Wis. : Northwestern Pub. House, 1997 (The People's Bible), S. 221).

Please turn to Deuteronomy 23

The Moabites were descendants of Lot from his incestuous union with his firstborn daughter (Gen. 19:30–38), and they were the Jews' enemies because of the way they had treated Israel during their pilgrim journey from Egypt to Canaan (Deut. 23:3–6; Num. 22–25). During the time of the Judges, Moab had invaded Israel and ruled over the people for eighteen years (Jdg. 3:12–14). They were a proud people (Isa. 16:6) whom God disdained. "Moab is My washpot," said the Lord (Ps. 60:8, KJV), a picture of a humiliated nation washing the feet of the conquering soldiers. They were worshipers of the god Chemosh, a deity whose worship was similar to that of Baal (Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:419).

In terms of assembly or financial relationship:

Deuteronomy 23:3-6 [3]"No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, [4]because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. [5]But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. [6]You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever. (ESV)

Likewise, in terms of interpersonal relationship

Nehemiah 13:23-25 [23]In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. [24]And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. [25]And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. (ESV) (Ezra 9:1,2; Neh. 13:23–25).

- At this time of history, God was protecting the covenantal purity of His people and forbade them to be bound with the Moabites in personal or financial matters.
- God gives us a New Covenant equivalent in 2 Cor. 6:14 about not being unequally yoked with an unbeliever. We can rationalize all we want, probably like Elimelech did, of possible evangelistic, or financial opportunities, but in binding relationships, where moral agreement is necessary, we are not to be bound with an unbeliever.

Ruth 1:2 [2]The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. (ESV)

#### 4) The consequences.

Names sometimes carry significance. Elimelech means “God is king.” In view of the much-repeated phrase “in those days Israel had no king” in the book of Judges, the Lord was not king in Elimelech’s life, for he left God completely out of his decisions. He made a decision out of God’s will when he went to Moab, and this led to another bad decision when his two sons married women of Moab.

Naomi’s name minus the last letter means “pleasant.” The suffix i is either the possessive my or an old Hebrew ending that would render Naomi’s name as “she who is pleasant.”

The two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, have rhyming names. The likely Hebrew words behind both names suggest illness. While ancient names generally reflected circumstances of birth or what the parents imagined their offspring were, or would become, It may be that both names were nicknames, given by the family after the fact in place of the names given at birth. Mahlon means “sickly,” and Chilion “failing,” or “wasting away.” Each name has been found at Ugarit, so they fit the era of the Judges when Scripture says the events took place (Richards, Lawrence O.: The Bible Readers Companion. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 175).

Ruth 1:3-4 [3]But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. [4]These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, (ESV)

Elimelech probably died not long after his arrival in Moab. This appears not only from the connecting “and”: “they came to Moab, were there, and Elimelech died” (cf. the Com. on Judg. 1:1), but may also be inferred from the circumstance that the sons did not marry while he was yet living (Lange, John Peter ; Schaff, Philip ; Cassell, Paulus ; Steenstra, P. H.: A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures : Book. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008, S. 12).

Orpah and Ruth were Moabites. Orpah’s name means “stubborn.” Ruth’s name means “friendship.” (MacArthur, John Jr: The MacArthur Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Ru 1:4)

Mahlon married Ruth (Ruth 4:10), and Chilion married Orpah. As previously alluded to, at this time Jews were forbidden to marry Gentile women, especially those from Ammon and Moab (Deut. 7:1–11; 23:3–6; Neh. 13:1–3; Ezra 9:1–4). It was the Moabite women in Moses’ day who seduced the Jewish men into immorality and idolatry; and as a result, 24,000 people died (Num. 25). Solomon’s experience later showed that the greatest problem in such a marriage is the temptation to serve the gods of one’s foreign wife (1 Kings 11:1–6; cf. Mal. 2:11).

- God’s directions for us are not to impede our joy, but to make our joy truly full. There

are many hidden dangers that we are not aware of and God does not want us to suffer these things.

The Israelites generally viewed the Moabites with suspicion, even when they were under firm Israelite control during the kingdom period. After a decade of marriage both Mahlon and Kilion die without leaving offspring. This eventuality desolates Naomi, who is now without any real means of support. Life for widows was precarious at best in the ancient Near East unless they were attached to some family. It is significant that the first form of social work undertaken by the primitive Christian church in Jerusalem was among needy widows (see Acts 6:1–6).

Without a male provider a widow was vulnerable to exploitation of various kinds, and if she could not find a family in which to live and work she was reduced to begging, prostitution, and often death by starvation. Naomi's sole relatives in Moab are her daughters-in-law, and the future of the family unit looks bleak (Elwell, Walter A.: Evangelical Commentary on the Bible . electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1996, c1989, S. Ru 1:6).

#### Illustration: No House Without Sorrow

Among the parables that Chinese teachers use is the story of a woman who lost an only son. She was grief-stricken out of all reason. She made her sorrow a wailing wall. Finally she went to a wise old philosopher. He said to her, "I will give you back your son if you will bring me some mustard seed. However, the seed must come from a home where there has never been any sorrow." Eagerly she started her search, and went from house to house. In every case she learned that a loved one had been lost. "How selfish I have been in my grief," she said, "sorrow is common to all." (Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979)

Elimelech and his family had fled Judah to escape death, but the three men met death just the same. The family had planned only to "sojourn" temporarily in Moab, but they remained for ten years (Ruth 1:4). At the end of that decade of disobedience, all that remained were three lonely widows and three Jewish graves in a heathen land.

Everything else was gone (v. 21). Such is the sad consequence of unbelief.

- Sin has a way of compounding in our lives. Even when we plan to just take a small deviation from what we know is right, we have taken the first step in the path of disobedience. The next is either an attempt to cover the first up or progress on the path. The first sin accepted makes it easier for the second and following.

We can't run away from our problems. We can't avoid taking with us the basic cause of most of our problems, which is an unbelieving and disobedient heart.

Quote: Oswald Chambers said: "The majority of us begin with the bigger problems outside and forget the one inside. A man has to learn 'the plague of his own heart' before his own problems can be solved . . ." (The Shadow of an Agony, p. 76).

**APPENDIX B**  
**STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **Questions from Bible Study/ Sermons**

There were six sermons chosen to guide bible study and create dialogue. These sermons were also used to give examples of how persons of the bible were chosen to work in the areas of evangelism, mission, and discipleship. Bible study discussion on the sermon was done the week after the delivery of the sermon. The context associates in bible study would ask questions as they related to the three areas used for the project. (Evangelism, mission, discipleship) If no questions came from the floor, the researcher would guide the discussion by asking the appropriate questions. The questions below represent how the bible study was guided. The dialogue that came from the sermon reflection would help/aid the context associates in their understanding of what they would be involved in as they began to go out into the community. It was the researcher's intention that the sermons and the study of said sermons would give the context associates an idea of what telling the good news was about.

#### **Questions**

1. How is Jesus able to change my life?
2. Will Jesus continue to pursue me if I'm not able to be reached?
3. Do you think you were dispatched by God?
4. What is spiritual enlightenment?
5. In my daily walk, what are the different ways to know that God is truly working in my life?
6. What is God's will in our lives?
7. How do you walk by faith?
8. How do we determine what problems are sent by God?

9. Does God send problems to test our faith?
10. What problems did Ruth encounter in her life to seek God's guidance?
11. What is the goodness of God's blessings?
12. Is God selective in the blessings bestowed upon His people?
13. What is good news?
14. How do we express the saying, "God is good, all the time God is good" to those persons that are not in a good place in their life?
15. What is meant by the Scripture of 1 Peter 1: 3? The promise of a new birth. How does this relate to the goodness of God?

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